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**Community Life**

**Hockey has Heart Fund-raising group helps 'hockey families' in need**

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By Paul R. Pace

Staff Writer

Hockey may be known as a sport where only the tough survive, but there's a dedicated group of volunteers that meets in Farmington Hills who show it's also a sport with a lot of heart.

Starting out as a single fund-raiser in 2002, the organization Hockey has Heart has grown by leaps and bounds in helping folks who are, in some way, connected to hockey. It doesn't matter how they're related to the sport, as long as there's an affiliation, said HHH President Lucy Oakleaf of Farmington Hills.

Simply put, the group hosts fund-raisers and donates the money to hockey families in need. In a short time, they've helped several hockey families across the state.

Livonia resident Susan McCoy is one of the group's benefactors.

She said she used to get a little jealous when her husband, Rick, kept playing in the Livonia Over 30 hockey league, but his interest in hockey is now helping the family through a very difficult time.

Rick, 54, suffered a massive stroke last summer and now needs constant care. Because he was self-employed, his medical insurance was limited.

Susan, a teacher, had to go back to work, but there is still the issue of having to pay \$600 a week for Rick's professional care. When someone mentioned the situation to the volunteers at Hockey has Heart, the board decided to donate money that would cover three months of care for Rick.

The gift is a godsend, said Susan.

"I can't say enough about them," she said. "They're just a wonderful organization."

Oakleaf said the hockey community is a tight-knit bunch. So, it's no surprise that there are 250 volunteers who host several fund-raisers throughout the year to keep a pool of funds for those families that need help.

"We get calls from people or a family member or other times, we'll hear about something and contact

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them," Oakleaf said about how benefactors are found.

"We've helped families from Livonia, Plymouth, Grand Rapids to Traverse City," she said. "Our charter is the state of Michigan."

Since forming, the organization has raised more than \$230,000 through its annual gala.

Friday, April 8, is the next gala for Hockey has Heart. It takes place at the Laurel Manor Banquet facility in Livonia.

Guests will enjoy cocktails, appetizers, multi-course dinner, open bar, dancing and music. The ticket price is \$225 per couple and includes two raffle tickets. There will also be a silent auction and basket raffles. To purchase tickets, call (248) 476-9127.

As far as the future is concerned, Oakleaf said members are discussing the possibility of expanding outside of Michigan.

"And we're always looking for new people who want to come on board and help," she said.

To learn more, check out the group's Web site at [www.hockeyhasheart.com](http://www.hockeyhasheart.com).

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