

Family keeps boy's memory alive by supporting Alexian Brothers Women and Children's Hospital

Since 10-year-old Michael S. DeLarco was killed by a train in 2004, his family and friends have worked hard to keep his memory alive and to ensure that his tragic death would lead to something good, particularly for children.

After his death, the Michael S. DeLarco Foundation was established to support railroad safety and to benefit various humanitarian efforts within the community. Each year, the foundation sponsors a golf fundraiser, and last year, the event benefited the new Alexian Brothers Women & Children's Hospital (ABWCH) in Hoffman Estates, Ill.

Michael's parents, Linda and Mike DeLarco, learned that the Alexian Brothers Foundation was hoping to raise funds for a library in a large playroom on ABWCH's pediatric floor, and they and their foundation's board designated funds from the golf fund-raiser for that purpose.

"Michael always loved to read and always had a book in his hand," Linda DeLarco says. "When we saw they needed a library, that was the situation that we wanted."

The DeLarco foundation agreed to stock and to maintain the library, and by the time ABWCH opened April 6, some of Michael's favorite books already were displayed there. The DeLarco foundation also will supply books, games and other items for the hospital's teen room and low-sensory room for autistic patients, as well as baskets of books and magazines for ABWCH waiting areas. "There's a lot our foundation can do," Linda DeLarco says. "The sky's the limit for those rooms and what we can provide for those kids."

To honor Michael's memory and to thank his family and their foundation, ABWCH's pediatric playroom has been named the Michael S. DeLarco Foundation Playroom.

The DeLarco family and their friends visited ABWCH during pre-opening festivities in March, and "it was such a moving experience when we saw Michael's name up on the doorway in the playroom," Linda DeLarco says. "It was very emotional for everyone."

Collaborating with the Alexian Brothers Foundation "is part of the healing" for the DeLarcos and their friends, she says. "There was this connection there in our initial meeting with (Alexian Brothers Foundation officials), being that we are giving back to our community and something right in our backyard," she says. "Especially because...(the cause) has to do with children. It means a lot to us when we help children."

Linda and Mike DeLarco and their daughters, Faith, 7, and Andreyka, 17, also participated in "Art Heals," an art auction staged by the Alexian Brothers Foundation in conjunction with ABWCH's opening. The auction featured a wide array of pieces created by Illinois artists, many of them children. The artwork is displayed throughout the hospital, reflecting the Alexian Brothers' focus on caring for the mind, body and spirit. "Each piece was carefully chosen to enhance the healing environment, offering encouragement and hope," says Mark Frey, President and Chief Executive Officer of Alexian Brothers Health System.

Auction participants could sponsor individual pieces, with proceeds benefiting the hospital. The auction "was very, very successful," raising more than \$100,000 by the time ABWCH opened, says Joan Scheffler, Assistant Vice President of the Alexian



Linda and Mike DeLarco and their daughters, Faith (front) and Andreyka, visit the Michael S. DeLarco Foundation Playroom at the new Alexian Brothers Women and Children's Hospital. The playroom is named in honor of the DeLarcos' son, Michael S. DeLarco, who was killed by a train in 2004.

Brothers Foundation.

A dedication plaque with an inscription chosen by the sponsor is displayed next to each piece of artwork. Many of the dedication requests are very moving, as is the DeLarcos' motivation for supporting ABWCH, Scheffler says.

"They're giving back and extending Michael's legacy, which will continue to touch the kids that come through our new hospital," Scheffler says.

Adds Linda DeLarco: "If we can bring a little happiness to other kids out of our sadness, then we've done a good thing."