

Fighting for Finn

St. Joseph Catholic School students, faculty, staff, parents, alumni and friends stage FinnFest to help one of their own



Finn Blaylock has his face painted at FinnFest, an event at St. Joseph Catholic School sponsored to raise money to help with Finn's expenses fighting childhood cancer. The event took place after school on Wednesday, Oct. 10.

Stories by Garrett Grove,
photo by Taylor Barnes

Finn Blaylock. It's a name that has been circulating around the St. Joseph community and beyond since the start of the school year.

Finn is a St. Richard Catholic School student. He may be young, but this 6-year-old is full of life and energy.

"He's enthusiastic about everything he does," said St. Joe senior Gabe Blaylock, Finn's oldest sibling. "Even something as simple as going out to eat – he's very enthusiastic about it."

Finn was diagnosed earlier this year with a rare form of cancer. The intensity and schedule of his cancer treatment has kept Finn out of

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Event raises more than \$10,000 for Blaylocks

Even before the start of the school year, the St. Joseph community rallied in support of Finn Blaylock and his family.

Prayer, meals, and financial support have been given to the family since the 6-year-old's diagnosis of cancer in May.

FinnFest, the afternoon fundraising festival at St. Joe on Wednesday, Oct. 10, raised more than \$10,000 for the Blaylock family to help cover Finn's medical expenses.

"This cause has renewed my soul and proven once again that St. Joe exists because God wants it to," St. Joe Principal Dena Kinsey said.

"I think we've shown future generations how to live their faith and to take care of each

other as (God) called us to."

FinnFest took place in and around Bill Raphael Field. People bought tickets to play games and buy food. The Knights of Columbus from St. Richard and St. Francis Catholic Churches as well as Outback Steakhouse donated food for the event.

The Bruin Jazz Band and Daniel and The Dirt Devils, a student led band, performed throughout the event – including Finn's favorite song, "They all Ask'd for You" by The Meters.

St. Joe alumnus Patrick Harkins also performed.

Senior Reid Smith said he was glad Finn enjoyed everything.

"It was a lot of fun, and it was

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school since finishing kindergarten in May 2018.

Despite all the negatives, there is something about Finn that rises above all – his enthusiasm. He loves to live life, to be in the outdoors, to fish in Mississippi waters, and to explore nature and the world.

The support for Finn and his fight against cancer has been massive. A blood drive for Finn in August received overwhelming support. Students, alumni, friends, and family stayed on campus for hours donating blood; some even stayed to 10 p.m. for an event that was scheduled to end at 7.

Countless people in the community have donated money and bought “Bruins Go Gold” T-shirts, whose proceeds go directly to the Blaylocks.

Additionally, the Spirit Stepper dance team wore gold ribbons this football season to support Finn and to shed light on Childhood Cancer Awareness Month in September.

“It is really an amazing thing

to me that we have grown up in a community that will rally together for any of us,” said Lelia DeGruy, a St. Joe senior. She has known the Blaylocks her whole life.

Support from outside the St. Joe community has also been remarkable. Football rivalries were laid aside for a greater good. Students at St. Anthony in Madison, which are

“It’s nice knowing that people are there for you.”

– Gabe Blaylock,
Finn’s brother
and a St. Joe senior

St. Richard’s rivals, continuously keep Finn in their thoughts and prayers every day just like the kids at Finn’s own school.

Jackson Prep’s student section wore gold in honor of Finn and in correlation with Childhood Cancer Awareness Month. Their students and community, along with St. Andrew’s, donated cash to the Blaylocks. Michael Boone, the head official in the St. Joe-St Andrew’s football game, even donated his game check to the Blaylock family.

“It’s nice knowing that people are there for you. The Mike Boone thing was really unexpected. It meant a lot to my family because it was somebody who had no prior



Photo by Kaycee Jackson/The Bear Facts

Mrs. Suzanne Antonaros paints the face of Finn Blaylock

connection to us. (He’s) just a good person,” Gabe said.

“Just everybody coming out and giving the support is like being able (to see) the Holy Spirit at work,” said Ann Cook, who, along with several others, helped plan fundraisers and events to benefit Finn.

The biggest event for Finn was FinnFest on the St. Joe campus, 4-7 p.m. on Wednesday, Oct. 10. The event included another blood drive from 11 a.m.-7 p.m.; live entertain-

ment with the St. Joe Jazz Band and a separate, independent, student band; food prepared and donated by volunteers; games for children; and a dunking booth featuring St. Joe teachers and coaches.

“It’s definitely difficult opening up to people,” Gabe said. “It’s hard to sit there and have people help you all the time and you can’t really do anything to repay them. But it really shows how grateful you are and how wonderful the community

is.”

The Blaylock family moved from New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina. Since moving here, their family has grown.

“It’s not in their nature to be receivers,” Mrs. Cook said. “They are very much giving people, so this is a bit of an adjustment for them. But they are overwhelmed by the love and the support.”

“They (the Blaylocks) are overwhelmed by the love and support”

– Mrs. Ann Cook,
a Blaylock
family friend