

Posted on Thu, Jun. 19, 2008

## Scholarships aid 2 who triumphed

**Two county students overcame physical challenges and received \$1,000 school awards.**

By Will Hobson  
For The Inquirer

Susanna DeLaurentis was a fifth grader at Elkins Park Middle School in Cheltenham Township when she died of neuroblastoma, a pediatric cancer that attacks the nervous system, in November 1999.



Nine years later the Susanna DeLaurentis Charitable Foundation has handed out eight \$1,000 college scholarships to graduating seniors in the Philadelphia area who have dealt with a chronic or life-threatening disease. Two of those scholarship winners, Dara Roberts and Meghan Trahey, are from Chester County, and both have inspiring stories to tell.

Dara Roberts was born with cerebral palsy, a group of neurological disorders that affect her muscle growth and development. As a result she has also developed scoliosis, curvature of the spine.

Roberts, a recent Unionville High School graduate, has undergone nine major surgeries during her 18 years, eight- to 12-hour procedures that have left her in a full-body cast during recovery.

Despite these challenges, Roberts has maintained a 4.0 grade-point average in high school and kept up a rather busy extra-curricular schedule, helping raise money for St. Jude Children's Hospital, the Make-A-Wish Foundation, and Easter Seals, among others.

"Dara was the complete candidate," said Michael DeLaurentis, Susanna's father who, along with wife Shelley, picked the eight scholarship winners out of 15 applicants. "By her nature she has channeled whatever her differences were into compassionate service."

Roberts' service included campaigning recently for Sen. Hillary Clinton, work that earned her a visit from former President Bill Clinton, as well as meetings with Gov. Rendell and his wife, Judge Marjorie O. Rendell.

"She has this ability to attract people to her," Wayne Roberts, Dara's father, said of her. "The group of people who have supported her have contributed a lot to what she's been able to achieve. They've given her self-confidence."

Dara, who wants to be a screenwriter, will attend Stanford University in fall 2009. She is delaying her freshman year for one more operation to remove plates and screws from her hips and legs.

Meghan Trahey, a tennis and softball player at Henderson High School in West Chester, started feeling sick in October 2006. Doctors couldn't figure out why Trahey felt nauseated until they ordered a CAT scan in December 2006, which found a tumor in her cerebellum, at the base of her brain.

Trahey was diagnosed with medulloblastoma, an aggressive form of brain cancer, and underwent surgery to remove the tumor three days before Christmas.

Starting in January, every morning before school Meghan and her father, Tim, woke at 5:45 and drove from their home in West Chester to the Alfred I. duPont Hospital in Wilmington for radiation treatment.

After six weeks of radiation, Trahey went through nine chemotherapy treatments, the last in February. The cancer has been in remission for four months.

"She didn't let it take over her life. She carried on with sports, argued with coaches to let her play . . . she's pretty impressive," DeLaurentis said.

Trahey missed her junior year of softball, but was able to return to the tennis team last fall, albeit a rung below where she was playing before, as the chemotherapy wreaked havoc on the nerve endings in her feet and hands.

After sitting out a few softball games this spring she returned to right field for Henderson, though, and was a team captain.

"Every once in a while she'd get tired and get down, but she'd get right back up. She was very strong, she just kept fighting," said her mother, Kim.

In October Meghan arranged for a fund-raiser, Score for the Cure, at Rustin High School. The day of tennis, volleyball, and ultimate Frisbee raised more than \$8,000 for pediatric brain cancer research at duPont.

"I just wanted to help out with the other patients," Trahey said. "There are so many little kids there, I was one of the older ones. All these little kids hooked up to machines, they ought to be out playing with their friends."

Trahey graduated in the top five percent of her class, and will attend Penn State's honors college this fall, where she plans to study civil engineering. She'll continue to get an MRI every three months to make sure the cancer has not returned.

"It definitely showed me that anything can happen at any time, so you want to make sure you live your life to the fullest," Trahey said. "I just think about living each day, and try to be grateful for what I have."

The Susanna DeLaurentis Foundation also donates to research of pediatric brain cancer and cystic fibrosis. For more information, visit [www.friendsofsusanna.org](http://www.friendsofsusanna.org).

Dara Roberts has a Web page with pictures and information about her and her many celebrity encounters: [www.daramichelle.net](http://www.daramichelle.net).

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