



# Lion's Roar

The Newsletter of the Companions in Courage Foundation

Fall 2004

## "Lion's Den" Makes a Difference Already

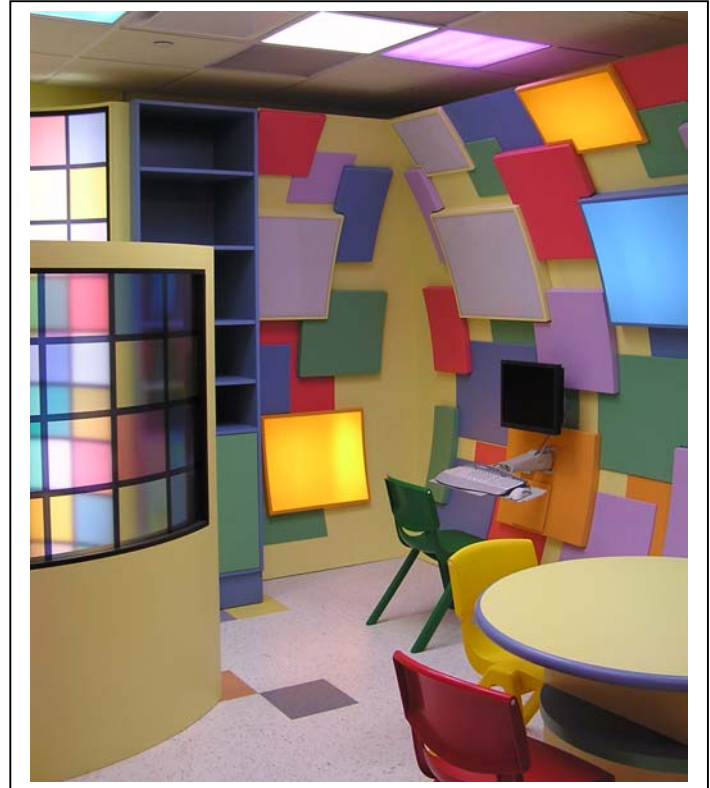
Pat LaFontaine's dream took another step forward on September 29<sup>th</sup>, when the first children entered the Lion's Den room at the Maria Fareri Hospital in Westchester, NY.

Despite the fact that technicians from Microsoft and Display Presentations were still working on the installation of the final components of the room, the allure was too great for some of the young patients.

Drawn by the revolving light that illuminated the hallway leading to the room, a group of teenagers approached the workmen and asked if they could come in.

One child wore a mask to protect her from germs, another tugged on the bar of a wheelchair, and a third girl carried her I-V "tree" into the room. They immediately were drawn to the Xbox games that line one side of the room and they started to play.

Marci Lewis of the hospital's Child Life unit huddled in a corner with one of the girl's mothers. They were marveling at how quickly the patients jumped into the action. Lewis explained, "five minutes ago, the girl with the I-V unit was in severe abdominal pain. She told her mother that she didn't even want to get out of bed today.



"But look at her now. She's giggling and laughing. She doesn't even know she's in a hospital anymore."

Remarkably, the first patient who ever walked into a Lion's Den room had the exact reaction that LaFontaine and his Companions in Courage set out to achieve when they first decided to build interactive game rooms in children's hospitals.

LaFontaine said, "This has been a collective effort from the moment we first approached Edwin Schlossberg at ESI Design to create this kind of environment. People like Brian Valentine at Microsoft picked up the spirit and hundreds of generous people have offered their creativity, enthusiasm and financial support to make this a reality."

"The reaction of our room's first "guest" tells me that it was all worthwhile."



Patients enjoy the new Lion's Den Room



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## 'Ironman' Tests His Mettle in November

"Before I turn 40, I want to compete in an Ironman Triathlon competition." With that proclamation, Pat LaFontaine began preparing for what will likely be the most grueling athletic event of his life.

In typical fashion, LaFontaine will use the experience to help raise money for sick kids.

On November 6<sup>th</sup>, LaFontaine and his Companions in Courage team that includes Pete Smith of Long Island and Bob DeAngelo of Connecticut, will compete in the Panama City (FL) Ironman Triathlon event. They will participate with more than 2,500 other competitors as they swim 2.4 miles in the Gulf of Mexico, bicycle 112 miles, and finish with a full 26.2 mile marathon. The time limit for the entire event is 17 hours, but LaFontaine said he is "only interested in finishing".

For the last few months, the hockey Hall of Famer has been diligently preparing for this arduous task.



He has had to really concentrate on his swimming technique as he preps for the competition. Pat said, "I'm very comfortable on the bike after competing in several 'century' events. I think the adrenaline will kick in for me on the run. But the swimming is something I haven't had much experience with".

In September, LaFontaine and Smith participated in a half-Ironman Triathlon in Narragansett, each finishing in just over 6 hours. Of the 433 starters in his age group, LaFontaine finished in 69<sup>th</sup> place. However, he lost any attempt at the "Lady Byng" when he incurred a 4-minute penalty for "drafting" during the bike leg.

He jokingly complained, "I want to file a protest on that ruling."



The Janus Fund is sponsoring a fund-raising aspect to the Florida race. They will provide additional funding to the Ironman who raises the most money for his/her charity. To find out how you can support both Pat and CiC in this effort, **visit our website at [www.CiC16.org](http://www.CiC16.org)**.

## Winged Foot Hosts 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual "Classic"

The Companions in Courage Foundation hosted their 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Golf Classic at Winged Foot Golf Club on Tuesday, October 5<sup>th</sup>. Just weeks earlier the prestigious club hosted the 2004 U.S. Amateur Championship and it is slated to host the U.S. Open in 2006.

Merrill Lynch and Allied Domecq served as primary sponsors of this year's event. Each group was well represented by the elite of their firms and helped contribute to a very successful day. Pat LaFontaine led a contingent of celebrities that included actor Denis Leary, baseball's David Cone, and Hockey Hall of Famers Marcel Dionne, Brad Park, Lanny McDonald, Bryan Trottier and Clark Gillies. They were joined by a group of current NHL stars including Alexei Kovalev, Adrian Aucoin, Rick DiPietro, Bryan McCabe and Michael Peca. The field of celebrities also included Ken Morrow, Ted Nolan, Patrick Flatley, Randy Wood and Paul Stewart. For the second straight year Gillies was the overall champ with a score of 75. DiPietro won the Long Drive contest and Dwight Jacobsen was Closet to the Pin with a shot nestled just 3'-6" from the hole.

***"No child in the fight for life or health should ever have to go through it alone."***



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## **Friends of the Foundation Nets a Companion**

On Monday, April 19<sup>th</sup>, the Companions in Courage "Friends of the Foundation" charity golf event was held at Huntington Country Club on Long Island. A perfect spring day and some pretty good golf greeted the participants at the North Shore club. Major sponsors for the event included Cambridge/Brighton Budget Planning Corp., Rheingold, Intrawest (Mountain Creek resorts), SwissAir, and Habberstad BMW.

One of the highlights of the event was the inspirational appearance of 13-year-old Brett Cooper of East Rockaway, LI and his family. As part of his Mitzvah Project, Brett decided to raise money on behalf of the CiC Foundation. He rented a local hockey arena for his Bar Mitzvah, auctioned off equipment and memorabilia, and ultimately raised almost \$5,000 in donations. Pat LaFontaine presented him with a plaque for his efforts that inspired one observer to note, "maybe some day he'll grow up to be a doctor and be able to treat the sick kids in a children's hospital." Right now, Brett would probably prefer to grow up to be a star in the NHL, but you never know..."

## ***CiC to Benefit from National Sports Museum***

A new National Sports Museum, scheduled to open in lower Manhattan by 2006, has designated Companions in Courage Foundation as one of three charities that will benefit from its proceeds.

At a Gracie Mansion news conference, the museum's CEO Philip Schwalb welcomed Pat LaFontaine and many dignitaries to the unveiling of plans for a world-class, interactive sports museum dedicated to the celebration of *all* sports and their significance in our lives and culture.

The National Sports Museum is the place for domestic and international visitors to experience the thrill and history of sports throughout the ages and throughout the world. No other venue in North America brings together more than 20 different sports as the Museum will.

In August, it was announced by Governor George Pataki and Mayor Michael Bloomberg that the museum had been approved for \$52 million in



**Following a press conference at New York's Gracie Mansion, CEO Philip Schwalb points out the value of a National Sports Museum to Pat LaFontaine**

Liberty Bonds to help in the building of the museum. An additional \$28 million will be raised in private placement to complete the project.

Schwalb expects visitors to the museum to exceed 600,000 people per year.

NYC Deputy Mayor Dan Doctoroff addressed the Gracie Mansion crowd and offered his full endorsement of the plans.

He said, "There is only one city in the world that can host a museum like this."

In addition to the CiC Foundation, the other charities that will benefit from a portion of museum gate receipts are the Jackie Robinson Foundation and the Autism Coalition.

For more information on the museum, visit [www.thesportsmuseum.org](http://www.thesportsmuseum.org).



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## **Companions in Courage:**

# **Mom Served as Original Inspiration for CiC**

One of the greatest compliments Pat LaFontaine receives these days, is when a hospital administrator learns of his "Lion's Den" project, and then asks, "Why did it take a *hockey player* to come up with such a great idea?

What they simply don't realize is that the driving force that inspired him to be the man he is today, and to do the work of the Companions in Courage Foundation, was his mother – Jay LaFontaine.

In July, his mom passed away after gracefully battling a lifelong heart ailment. "She was the original companion in courage to me," Pat said.

She was beautiful and elegant and was often likened to former first lady, Jacqueline Kennedy. "With everything she went through, she was the person who kept our family strong and close," said her husband of 41 years, John.

At age 7, Mrs. LaFontaine suffered from rheumatic fever that damaged her heart. The rest of her life was spent in and out of hospitals. She had three open heart surgeries during her life. After the birth of her third child, she was also diagnosed with Hepatitis C, yet she never complained.

The toll of a lifetime of illness began to affect other parts of her anatomy. She developed severe liver and blood disease, yet she continued to persevere.

Many remember her at the 1<sup>st</sup> Annual CiC Foundation Golf Classic as she helped prepare and distribute the golfer's gifts. She reveled in the moment as she saw all the good that was being accomplished that day.

After her passing, Dr. Kim Eagle, chief of clinical cardiology at the University of Michigan Cardiovascular Center wrote, "Her equanimity in dealing with her medical setbacks was perhaps the most advanced that I've ever seen."



**Jay LaFontaine**

He continued, "Her zest for life, her family, and her faith will always be a part of me and I'm sure those who had the pleasure of knowing her."

Her friends and family will remember a woman who spent 25 years as a consultant for Mary Kay cosmetics, yet had time to volunteer with several charities in her Waterford, MI community.

During the last few months of her life, she expressed frustration that her illness was causing her to become tired in the afternoons. And that was cutting into the time she could spend volunteering at her church and in the community.

The last night of her life was spent at home in Michigan with her family by her side. Homeowners from the local lake association were setting off a fireworks display and the laughter of children wafted into her bedroom window.

It reminded her son of all the great memories they had shared as a family. "We had a lot of great times with her," Pat said. "She would want us to celebrate her life and celebrate her memories."

Perhaps her greatest legacy will be the inspiration she provided as the impetus for the Companions in Courage Foundation.

**[www.CiC16.org](http://www.CiC16.org)**