

fund highlights



NICK SMILES ON THE FINE ARTS FOUNDATION

established 2010

Ask anyone to tell you the first thing they noticed about Nick Mullin. Most people will say, “His smile.”

Nick’s contagious smile was a friendly greeting filled with infinite inspiration. His smile embodied the spirit that Nick’s friends and family adored. Nick’s energy, exuberance and “let’s get on with life” attitude helped Nick through his courageous four year battle with a rare form of pancreatic cancer. Although Nick passed away in May 2010 at the age of 20, he left a smile that endures.

In grade school, Nick began dabbling in the fine arts by acting in plays. Nick’s love of the stage grew. At Bishop Shanahan High School, he auditioned for every single production in the Fine Arts Department. Nick acted in plays including Barnum, Les Miserables, Evita, The King and I and Seussical the Musical.

A self-taught guitarist, Nick learned to read music so he could join Shanahan’s band. Since Shanahan was short a French horn, that became his chosen instrument. “Why not?” was Nick’s attitude.

Nick joined Chester County Voices Abroad during his sophomore year of high school. He took his smile, energy, and voice to France, singing at Lourdes, Tours, Omaha Beach, Lisieux, Paris and Chartres. His voice teacher, Marge Campbell, remembers Nick often saying to her, “Your day is about to begin because I’m here.”

Amidst all this artistic discovery, Nick began experiencing abdominal pain during his sophomore year at Shanahan. The pain got increasingly worse, and numerous doctor appointments yielded few answers. The summer before Nick’s senior year, pancreatic cancer was discovered. Nick underwent major surgery to remove his pancreatic tumor, followed by a regimen of radiation therapy and chemotherapy.

Following surgery, the first question he had for his doctor was, “When can I get back on the stage? I need to ride a unicycle in Godspell. Nick’s Summer Stage Director, Ann McCarney, remembers:

“I knew he was fighting an illness, but at the time I just thought it was surgery for stomach issues. I had no clue that this teenage kid had just recovered from major surgery due to pancreatic cancer! I guess I was clueless because not long after his surgery he was at our long rehearsals every day. He had a huge smile on his face and a song in his heart as he kept up with the rest of our cast members. Now upon reflection, I see how his spirit carried him through difficult, tiring times. Nick was faced with a life-threatening illness. Still, he managed to get up on stage and do what he did best—to entertain and make people smile as well.”

At Penn State University, Nick explored radio broadcasting and spent a semester as an internet radio reporter. Regrettably, Nick’s pancreatic cancer returned after his freshman year. Sadly, he passed away a year later.

After Nick’s passing, donations were made by family, friends and classmates. Nick’s parents, Dee and Tom, were thankful. Tom recalls, “Dee and I never had a doubt that we wanted to do something positive in Nick’s memory. When the going got tough,



Nick’s smile embodied the spirit
friends and family adored.

Nick never stopped smiling. His focus was on his love of life and his friends and family. So on the toughest days of our life, we chose to do something positive to honor Nick’s spirit and make people smile.”

A family member suggested that a Community Foundation may be what Dee and Tom needed to help them administer funds in Nick’s memory.

Notes Tom, “We would never have been able to have the immediate success with Nick Smiles on the Fine Arts Foundation without being part of the Chester County Community Foundation. The Community Foundation helped us with administrative and tax details, and helped us learn how to orchestrate successful community fundraising events. Foundation staff help when we hit roadblocks and encourage us every step of the way.”

Nick Smiles on the Fine Arts Foundation initially supports projects of the Fine Arts Department of Bishop Shanahan High School. Dee and Tom are extremely grateful:

“When Nick was challenged with the rigor of chemotherapy and radiation, his friends and teachers at Shanahan encouraged, supported, and treated him like any other performer. This made all the difference in the world to Nick and his will to fight through the challenge. Through the years, Shanahan has provided immeasurable opportunities for students to excel in the fine and performing arts.

Chuck Keating, Fine Arts Chair and Director of Bands, notes, “My definition of ‘inspiration’ is ‘Nick Mullin.’ Nick’s dedication and fun loving character was contagious. I never met someone with so much positive energy. His smile could change a rainy day into sunshine. Nick was and is an inspiration for us all. We, as teachers, hope and pray that our students have positive role models in their lives. As a teacher, Nick is a role model for me.”

As a further nod to Nick’s contagious energy for life, high school friends gathered on November 24, 2010 at a dedication ceremony at Bishop Shanahan. Two classmates spearheaded an enthusiastic fundraising campaign for Nick’s memorial. A tree, bench and plaque inscribed, “Nick Mullin, Class of 2008, Forever Smiling” reside in the same bus loop where, for four years, Nick greeted and said goodbye to his friends.

Nick inspired so many. His memory continues in a loop, forever smiling, turning rainy days into sunshine.