

Phil Yagoda: A Man with a Mission, A Man With a Heart

51

Phil Yagoda is faced with a challenge. Not only is he meeting it, he is using it to benefit others.

Phil was born and raised in New York, where he met his wife Cheryl, an Atlanta native. In 1999, the young couple moved to Atlanta to raise their family among family. Today, the Yagodas live in Sandy Springs with their identical twin ten-year old daughters, Arly and Sophie, who attend the Epstein School, and five-year old Ian, who attends the Atlanta Speech School. Phil is a Managing Director at the Deutsche Bank, specializing in wealth management.

The Challenge: When Ian was two years old, he was diagnosed with a type 2 astrocytoma located in his brain stem, more commonly known as a brain tumor.

From the outset, the Yagodas' response was as much outward as it was inward.

"As shocked as we were at the time to hear and contemplate the horrific disease that plagued our child, we were equally shocked to learn that there was hardly any research being done."

Statistics show that approximately 35,000 children living in the U.S. have tumors of the brain or spinal cord. Next to accidental causes, cancer is the second leading cause of death in children, with brain tumors being the most common of these. Phil was shocked to learn that, "less than 3% of all funding at NIH goes to research for pediatric brain tumors. That's 35,000 kids who are being 'left behind!'"

Thus began Ian's Friends Foundation (IFF), a non-profit organization committed to funding the support of pediatric brain tumor

research, and increasing public awareness of the severity of this disease.

"Our hope is to start the research and have someone else take it to the finish. We're not in this for profit, just for the cure!"

Together as a team, Phil and Cheryl have invested a lot of time and creativity into developing fundraising projects for IFF. One



of the ways the Yagodas have fundraised has been through personal solicitations. "We have a great close-knit Jewish community here in Atlanta."

They've also done Galas and, most recently, a family day with entertainment including MZ Stage Works, the Yellin children and the awesome Shannon Tanner of Hilton Head. They created a custom royal blue Alligator belt that was worn by PGA tour professionals. Identical belts are sold to the public to raise both awareness and dollars to support research. One 12 year old girl, Erin Beiner, chose to make IFF a beneficiary of her Bat Mitzvah project, which she called 'Ice for Ian.' Erin raised thousands of dollars by soliciting a local ice rink to donate the proceeds of that day to IFF.

While balancing family life, career and IFF, Phil takes the time to recharge his spiritual batteries at Tuesday Torah study sessions with Rabbi Michael Lipschutz of the Atlanta Scholars Kollel. The two study partners find themselves touching on many of the fundamentals of Jewish philosophy, culled from the Mishnah and Talmud (the Oral Tradition.) "Rabbi Lipschutz is an

amazingly warm person who you just want to pour out your heart to and talk with, about anything!"

That translated into another opportunity to share his mitzvah passion with others. Phil was invited to speak to college students of the ASK Maimonides program. He told them about Ian and IFF and also how his Torah learning has positively affected his life and business. Phil sums it up this way: "It's all about awareness.

Awareness of who they are as members of the Jewish community. They get connected through the Maimonides program. They get a real life picture of charity. We have to pass the message on to the next generation, because they're the ones who will continue. Dor l'Dor (from generation to generation)." Phil definitely succeeded in passing on his message. After his talk, the students were moved to do their part, and are now planning a 'Battle of the Grills' fundraiser to benefit IFF!

Thankfully, Ian is currently in stable condition. May we all have Ian in our thoughts and prayers for a refuah shelaimah (a complete recovery.)

Please visit www.lansfriendsfoundation.com for more information.