Wassel Strong

McKeesport community supports deputy fire chief with tailgate fundraiser

The McKeesport community came together this fall in support of Deputy Fire Chief Vince Wassel, who was diagnosed with brain cancer in September.

McKeesport Fire Department and friends of the Wassel family organized a Wassel Strong foundation and hosted a tailgate party at the Palisades for the October 25 Pittsburgh Steelers game. Tickets were sold for $20, offering food, drinks, tickets for a basket auction, and door prizes. The event also included raffles and T-shirt sales and post-game entertainment by Pittsburgh Piano Man Gerald McGrew Jr.

McKeesport Fire Capt. Gene Esken, who coordinated the fundraiser, said the event was a success.

"We raised a good chunk of money for the Wassel family, and they were very appreciative of everyone in the community and our fire department," Esken said. "I don't think they realized how much support they had until they walked in. They were totally taken aback."

Members of the Wassel family expressed their gratitude, as they addressed the packed Palisades crowd of more than 700 guests.

"This shows that everyone is right behind him," Vince's daughter Ashleigh Wassel said. "We're all fighting right along with him."

The Wassel family sat in a VIP area of the Palisades, welcoming visitors to stop by and talk with Vince. He greeted everyone with a smile, thanked them for attending and became emotional at times.

"This is amazing," Vince said, overwhelmed by the experience. "Just look at the number of people who came out! But what's with all the moustaches?"

Vince referred to his newly mustachioed coworkers, who grew their facial hair as another way to rally support and awareness for their friend. There was even a display where attendees could vote for their favorite moustache.

Vince thanked fellow firefighters, police, public officials, friends and family for bringing the community together to help his family.

Donations to Wassel Strong will be accepted at Parkview Community Federal Credit Union, 2100 Eden Park Blvd., McKeesport, 15132.

Veterans Banner Program

The City of McKeesport and Burt Foster American Legion Post 361 unveiled its first round of banners along Fifth Avenue on October 14 in the McKeesport Veterans Banner Program. With 44 banners completed, new orders are being placed daily. "It is an honor to be involved in a program that recognizes our veterans while beautifying our city," councilwoman Jamie Brewster Filotei said. "The American Legion and Cmdr. Bobbie Billsborrow deserve a round of applause for making our vision possible and allowing the people of McKeesport to see how many veterans they have in their hometown."