

Dance video boosts teacher

Crosby High students unite to fight disease
BY MICHAEL PUFFER REPUBLICAN-AMERICAN

WATERBURY

Most people can't pronounce "lymphangioleiomyomatosis," but many at Crosby High School are aware of the rare lung disease thanks to a music video involving more than 300 enthusiastic students.

In the five-minute video, students and a few staff members wave feathers and dance in hallways, classrooms, the library, cafeteria and gym to the tune of "Uptown Funk."

It was produced to draw attention to the rare disease, and released on May 28, three days ahead of National LAM Awareness Day.

Crosby students were eager to participate in order to help health teacher Madeline Nolan, who was diagnosed with the degenerative disease in 1999.

STUDENT AMEERA RUBANI said students are impressed with Nolan's perseverance. They see she enjoys school despite her ailment.

"We see how Mrs. Nolan doesn't let it faze her," Rubani said. "She has a lot of energy. We want to help her have fun."

By 5:30 p.m. Tuesday, the video posted to Youtube had 5,285 hits.

Nolan was diagnosed in 1999, after a routine blood test showed too many red blood cells. Several visits to specialists and a CAT scan later, she had her diagnosis. The disease is characterized by muscle tissue spreading in the lungs, forming cysts and choking off breath. Nolan began wearing a portable oxygen pump shortly after she was diagnosed.

"LAM is so rare that physicians and medical professionals have not heard of it," Nolan said, talking about the importance of the student video. "It is often misdiagnosed as emphysema or asthma or 'just your imagination.' So this (video) leads to greater awareness of LAM and we get more women who are diagnosed earlier."

The disease predominantly strikes women of child-bearing age, according to the LAM Foundation. Patients can survive decades as their lungs degenerate.

Nolan has been an active campaigner against LAM. She has hosted fundraisers at her home in Naugatuck. She has also organized "rare disease days" at school and the state Capitol.

Nolan estimates more than 300 students took part in the latest project. Art classes helped produce giant feathers (symbols of the LAM Foundation) and other props.



Crosby High School Health Teacher Madeline Nolan leads a choreographed dance in a video intended to raise awareness of lymphangioleiomyomatosis, a rare lung disorder from which she suffers. Erin Covey Republican-American

Craig Ziogas, son of former interim Crosby Principal Gregory Ziogas, volunteered the services of his Thomaston-based production company, CT Green Screen Productions. Naugatuck Valley Community College student Micah Small, a 2012 Crosby graduate, helped with choreography.

Crosby chemistry teacher Paul Schwartz, 26, grew up next to Nolan. He remembers her neighborhood fundraisers, including a dunk tank. He can be seen in the video, putting on goggles, dancing and waving a feather duster in his classroom.

"Teaching, it's tough to get kids to write on a piece of paper some days," Schwartz said. "So it was great to see them so organized."

CROSBY HIGH SCHOOL recently began a large-scale state-funded turnaround meant to reverse years of low academic performance and poor morale. Staff and students interviewed Tuesday said they can already see improvement and rising school pride. Nolan said the video provided a good opportunity to show off that pride.

"Our school has a reputation of being really bad, but in this video we can show other people and other schools our school is not that bad," said 16-year-old Sheesy Schontten. "The students, they know how to have fun and they have so many talents."

Schontten said students were eager to sign up because they love Nolan. It didn't hurt that the project involved getting a little time out of class and the prospect of appearing on television, she joked.

"My goal is to be on 'Ellen,'" Nolan joked.