

Romito Foundation offers hope to kids with Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy

By Jen Reeder
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FIRESTONE – Last year when Dominic Romito was 6 years old, he was a fairly typical kid. He loved to play, and wanted to be like his big brother and play football. But he complained his hips hurt when he climbed the stairs at home. A trip to the doctor provided a devastating diagnosis: Dominic has Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy (DMD), a less common form of MD.

“You’ve heard of MD for years, but you never think it’s your family,” said Penny Romito, Dominic’s grandmother.

DMD, a progressive muscle disorder that causes loss of muscle function and independence, is the most fatal genetic disorder diagnosed during early childhood, according to the nonprofit organization Parent Project Muscular Dystrophy. There are approximately 15,000 young men with Duchenne alive today in the United States.

The more Dominic plays and exercises, the more damage he causes to his muscle tissue. The doctor told Dominic’s parents, Richard and Jamie, that Dominic would not walk past age 10, would need a wheelchair and a breathing apparatus, and then most likely die in his late teens to early 20s.

“It’s the biggest blow of your whole life,” Romito said.

But the first-grader doesn’t know how sick he is, though he isn’t allowed to run and play with his friends the way he’d like. He doesn’t act like he has a terminal disease.

“You’d never know,” Romito said.

Dominic’s family tries to be as normal as possible so that he can enjoy life, though the “outdoorsy” folks have had to learn to accept indoor activities like video games rather than sports like soccer and football.

It’s clear he’s adored.

“He’s an absolute charmer,” his grandmother said. “When those eyes look at you, he melts you like glue, you’re like putty in the hand. He loves to live and play, just like any other little kids.”

In the face of this challenge, the

Romito family is not prepared to give up. Instead, they have formed the Romito Foundation, a nonprofit organization dedicated to raising money for research for DMD.

“We’re fighters,” Romito said. “This is a reflection of our family.”

There is hope in the scientific community. At a conference in Philadelphia earlier this year, the Romitos heard from an Australian doctor experimenting with a possible treatment option called Exxon Skipping, which stops the deterioration in isolated muscles. Human trials would be needed to find a way to stop the deterioration in all muscles. It has not been approved in the U.S., but may be attempted overseas in the next nine to 18 months.

In the meantime, the family continues their work with the foundation.

“The disease process is incredibly sad,” said Jo Vroman, vice president of the Romito Foundation. “It has a 100 percent fatality rate. It’s a heart-wrenching, heartbreaking disease. It is more than unfair and not OK.”

She said the foundation is important because DMD is not as well known and research supported as diseases like cancer and AIDS.

“This is an orphan disease – it gets little to no government funding,” she said.

Vroman said there is also a separate fund, called The Dominic Fund, to help the Romitos with the medical costs of providing Dominic with things he’ll need in the future, such as a wheelchair or a flight to wherever the human trials will be held for the possible treatment. She is neighbors with the Romitos – her 6-year-old daughter KayLynn is close friends with Dominic, who Vroman calls “beautifully, perfectly shy” – and said his parents are terrific people.

“These are people that are very active in their community and giving to other people,” Vroman said. “It’s just impossible not to love this family.”

She said that Richard and Jamie Romito are inspirational.

“Richard has a fierce determination and an intensity that motivates others to action,”



Photo courtesy of The Romito Foundation

Seven-year-old Dominic Romito suffers from Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy, a progressive muscle disorder with no current cure.

Vroman said. “Jamie is an incredibly patient, wonderful mother and an incredible nurse. She has to wake up every day and look her boy in the face and be a happy mom. And the family is such a happy family. They have such hope and such joy.”

The Romitos have found great support from the community, particularly from Daveco Liquors, which has held several fundraisers for the Romito Foundation, such as a golf tournament at Vista Ridge Golf Course on Sept 8. Daveco will also be hosting a car show from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. on Sept. 20 in its parking lot at 16434 N. Washington St. in Thornton. Representatives from the foundation will be on hand to answer questions and accept donations for the Dominic Fund.

“Daveco Liquor has been outstanding about getting behind us,” Vroman said. “They’ve done so much. It is breathtaking the hope that they’re bringing.”

Dominic’s father, Richard Romito, said that the foundation is the thing that “keeps me going.”

“It’s my way of knowing I’m fighting for my son,” he said. “That’s the way I want to give back.”

Eventually, once Dominic is hopefully healed, he said he would like to use the foundation to create a retreat in the Rocky Mountains where children with disabilities can come and enjoy time with their families. He was inspired last year when the Make-a-Wish

Foundation sent his family to Disneyland. They stayed in a place called “Give Kids the World,” where there was an ice cream parlor, pizza available anytime and toys distributed every morning. Kids there were happy.

“It would be totally free,” he said. “That’s our ultimate goal.”

In the meantime, the Romitos are treating every day with Dominic as a gift. Penny Romito said that parents should treasure their time with their kids.

“Love your children. You never know when something could happen,” she said. “Be a part of their lives.”

For more information about the Romito Foundation, visit www.RunDRun.com.

Donations to the Romito Foundation or the Dominic Fund may be sent to:

Romito Foundation or the Dominic Fund
c/o Chase Bank
Attn: Jackie
11040 Colorado Blvd.
Firestone, CO 80504

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No new council member

(Dacono, from page 4)

though “Band-Aids” are not the answer, the money and resources that students and teachers need now can’t be put off.

“The more we educate kids, the more they can educate themselves,” Councilwoman Kay Cole said.

No new council member

After four attempts to appoint a new council member after Shawn Hayes resigned in August, the issue remained unresolved.

The four candidates, Christopher

Kresge, Joe Baker, Steve Ditlow and John Bozeman were all interviewed prior to the council meeting, but did not receive the city mandated four votes to become the new council member.

“All the people are qualified,” Mayor Wade Carlson said, “we are fortunate to have this problem.”

At the mayor’s insistence, the vote was conducted through a secret ballot. The council members repeatedly changed their vote and no one was appointed. The council moved to continue the issue to the next meeting.

Enforcement constraints

(Frederick, from page 5)

Trustee Tony Carey urged the board in the future to trust their staff to negotiate the best contract possible, and not doubt their ability to look out for the town’s interests.

Ordinance enforcement constrained by resources

Trustee Gerry Pfirsch voiced concerns that codes and ordinances were not being enforced within the town.

Town Administrator Derek

Todd said code enforcement is a question of resources. According to Todd, code enforcement is a full time, 40 hour per week job for the two community service officers. He added that often the best way to get something fixed is to call the police station or town hall rather than waiting for the issue to be fixed.

One of the biggest limiting factors in code enforcement is that the current model of being reactive works the best with what’s available, Todd said.