



# **Broyles finds way to touch hearts in his fund-raising work to discover diabetes cure**

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Since he was 7 years old standing on a street corner with a lemonade stand, Connor Broyles has been raising money for diabetes and a cure for the illness.

This past weekend he was positioned at Gateway Motor Sports Park with a table taking donations and selling raffle tickets for a jersey of a famous Blues' hockey player. Connor is in his eighth year of raising funds for the walk and has collected more than \$30,000 for the cause in his young lifetime.



*Connor Broyles stands next to a poster promoting sales of a St. Louis Blues hockey star Alexander Steen jersey at Gateway Motor Sports Park last weekend. Broyles will be walking this weekend at the Metro East Step Out: Walk to Stop Diabetes at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville. Tickets will still be sold for the jersey and all proceeds contributed back to the walk.*

Broyles, an Alton High School junior, will also participate in the Metro East Step Out: Walk to Stop Diabetes, set for this Saturday at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville. The event starts at Parking Lot A at SIUE and the two courses are 1.5 and 3 miles around the SIUE Botanical Gardens. Activities begin at 8:30 a.m. Anyone interested can still register or donate the day of the race.

Connor always tells everyone he comes in contact with that the key to living successfully with diabetes is simple: “stay positive.”

Connor's mom, Leslie Smith, said she didn't know if anyone would ever have enough time to listen about how proud she is of her son and what he has done with his life to date.

"It is hard to believe what he has accomplished in the 10 years he has had diabetes," she said. "He qualified for nationals last year in wrestling. He has a very kind heart. Diabetes is not an easy illness to live with; there are no black and whites."

Rawnie Berry, coordinator of the Metro East Walk, said Connor always "finds a way" in raising funds and awareness for the illness.

Broyles, a youth ambassador for the Metro East Walk, was sitting on a plane over the summer and he sat next to someone affiliated with the National Hockey League. During a lengthy conversation, he told Connor if he ever needed anything for his diabetes fundraising work to contact him. This fall, Connor reached out; the man sent an official St. Louis Blues Alexander Steen jersey to be raffled at the walk. Connor, 16, said he was overjoyed at the man sending him the jersey and contributing to the annual walk. Raffle tickets will be sold at the Metro East Walk on Saturday.

Last weekend, a man at the Gateway Sports Park spoke to Connor. He had Type 2 Diabetes and weighed about 300 pounds. After speaking with Connor, upon leaving he gave his ticket for the raffle back and said if we draw his name to put the money back. I feel Connor touched him and the man touched me by what he did," said Smith.

At the Metro Step Out Walk kickoff Connor spoke. Toward the end he asked to go back and speak again and he talked to everyone about how important it is to be positive as a diabetic and the things he does in his life to stay positive. In the end, there wasn't a dry eye in the house, according to Connor's mom.

Last year under Berry's guidance, the Metro East Step Out: Walk To Stop Diabetes had the highest percentage increase in the United States, with a 138 percent increase over its goal. The walk raised more than \$110,000 last year.

Berry said her group is hoping to get to last year's total again this year. The proceeds go toward a summer camp for children, educational programs for those with diabetes and also to research and overall American Diabetes Association program.

"We provide a myriad of educational programs that are free to participants throughout the year," she said. "The funds raised at the walk are just vital."

Berry and Broyles both encourage residents to walk Saturday or just come and donate or post funds on the ADA website at <http://www.diabetes.org/stepoutmetroeast>.