

FORSYTH HERALD

## Music for Megan publicizes little-known disease

### Mitochondrial Disease awareness tops Sept. 28 concert event

by Scott Sowers

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Hope can come in many forms: having a friend help you in a time of need, receiving donations raised through charitable means and hearing good news about a particularly tough situation.

Laura Sheridan would like to spread hope through music. Her 4-year-old daughter Megan was diagnosed with Mitochondrial Disease (complex I) at the age of 16 months.

Since then, her family has been on a quest to raise awareness of the rare disease that afflicts one in every 4,000 births annually.

The Forsyth family will culminate their efforts with the benefit concert Music for Megan, Sept. 28 at Wills Park in Alpharetta.



(SPECIAL/Herald) Gov. Sonny Perdue holds Megan Sheridan in his arms after honoring her Aug. 28 at the Georgia State Capitol by proclaiming Sept. 28 to be "Mitochondrial Awareness Day."

#### Music for Megan

**When:** Friday, Sept. 28, 6-10 p.m.

**Where:** Wills Park Arena.

**Tickets:** \$15 individual or \$35 for a family pass.

All proceeds will go to the UMDF. For information on the event or to purchase tickets online visit [www.meganshope.org](http://www.meganshope.org).

"Our goal for this event is to raise awareness for this terrible disease and educate more people about it," Laura Sheridan said. "We would love to raise money for research, but right now we'd rather have a million people at the event learning than raise a million dollars."

There will be a full slate of fun activities that the entire family can enjoy at the event. From 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. there will be entertainment for children and parents to participate in, including three moonwalks, face painting, balloon animals and crafts (children will have the opportunity to make their own tambourines).

Other events are sure to please those of all ages. A \$5 raffle ticket will give concertgoers the chance to win a vacation to Hilton Head, a hotel stay in Buckhead or a set of junior golf clubs among many more prizes.

Shane's Rib Shack, The Varsity and Brewster's Ice Cream will be on hand to sell concessions, but there will also be free popcorn available.

Before the concert begins, there will be a speech from Chris Swinn, the president of the Atlanta chapter of the United Mitochondrial Disease Foundation (UMDF). His 11-year-old daughter Emily, who has mitochondrial disease, will read a poem for the crowd.

From 8 p.m. to 10 p.m. the evening will shift to music with Northpoint Community Church worship leader Todd Field's band headlining the show. Their fan-friendly mix of covers ranges from Van Halen to John Mayer and sidesteps to a country tune or two by Martina McBride.

At Laura Sheridan's request, the band will end their set with a few worship songs in order to spread hope for finding a cure.

The reason behind the desire for more education on the disease is the lack of notoriety mitochondrial disease possesses, Sheridan said.



(SCOTT SOWERS/Herald) The Sheridan family, from left Megan, Laura, Tyler and Trey, will put on the Music for Megan benefit concert for Mitochondrial Disease awareness Sept. 28 in Wills Park in Alpharetta.

"Right now many people are unaware this disease exists, we absolutely are doing everything we can to get the word out," Sheridan said. "The problem these days is that many of the researchers who have done 'mito' research are retiring and there aren't many young people behind them to continue the research."

Sheridan will soon head a panel of mothers of children with this disease. The panel will talk to new medical students, urging them to dedicate their focus on mitochondrial disease treatment and research.

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### **What is Mitochondrial Disease?**

The mitochondria are the power plants of cells in the body. Their primary function is to convert food to energy. Mitochondrial Disease affects this process and prevents the body from getting energy to the organs that need it most: the heart, brain, muscles and lungs. This disease affects the immune system and makes it more likely that a child can suffer complications from a typical illness such as the flu or common cold. Defects in mitochondrial function can make it more likely that someone afflicted will suffer from Parkinson's, Alzheimer's, heart disease and cancer.

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### **Disease cruelly attacks children**

Megan's Mitochondrial Disease forces her to lead a different lifestyle than most 4-year-olds.

Because she has an inability to eat, she is required to have a feeding tube on her at all times – during the day she wears it in a backpack while at night it hangs from a pole by her bed, like an IV drip.

Other problems Megan faces are severe acid reflux, slow growth, sensory dysfunction, a compromised immune system and significant developmental delay. Despite all of this, she is a happy child, spending much of her time playing with her 2-year-old brother, Tyler, when she is not attending her special education classes at Matt Elementary School.

"The [effects] of the disease are very different for every child," said Megan's father, Trey Sheridan. "She's doing fine now, but the scary part is it can change just like that, and tomorrow she can have complications."

With this concert, the Sheridans hope that one day there can be a cure for the disease, or at least better treatment options than are currently available. As a part of their efforts, Megan was recognized by Gov. Sonny Perdue Aug. 28 for promoting awareness of the disease.

Gov. Perdue proclaimed Sept. 28 as Mitochondrial Disease Awareness Day in Georgia.

"We believe that Megan's purpose in life is to get more people to know about this disease. We want all kinds of people at the event, even more than just Mito families," Laura Sheridan said.