



A Model of Excellence



"I fight the fight for every mother, father, sister, aunt, uncle, son, daughter and family friend who has lost a loved one to HCM. They're never far from my memory and always in my heart."

"I will never give up the fight."

On a mission to raise awareness and save lives, Holly Morrell, Executive Director, A Heart for Sports, (Yorba Linda, CA) has a spirit that just won't quit.



Meet up with Holly Morrell on any given day and you'll see a young, vibrant and purpose-driven woman. What isn't apparent is the time bomb ticking inside her heart. "I was diagnosed with hypertrophic cardiomyopathy (HCM) in 2002," says Holly. "I was one of the lucky ones." Holly's story is one of triumph and tragedy. To arrive at where she is today required the courage and love of the entire Morrell clan, advances in modern medicine and her relentless pursuit for answers.

The Morrells' battle with HCM began in 1956, long before the medical community knew much about what is known today as a genetic heart defect. "I inherited my mom's eyes and my dad's predisposition to HCM," says Holly. "By the time I was conclusively diagnosed with HCM, we had lost five family members to the disease and then in 2005, my dad passed away." It was Holly's dad, Chuck Morrell, who introduced her to Seaneen Greaves and Jeff Greaves, founder and co-founder of A Heart for Sports (AHFS). "I immediately wanted to get involved with AHFS because of its mission to save young lives from sudden cardiac death (SCA) through early detection and increased public awareness.



I saw it as a tribute to the family members we had lost. So I joined forces with my dad, who was an AHFS Ambassador up until he died. I knew in my heart I could help others because I knew what it was like to lose loved ones. Three years after I started running the organization my participation became even more personal. In July 2002, I was conclusively diagnosed with HCM. I received an implantable

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defibrillator that same year and haven't missed a beat since."

According to Barry J. Maron, M.D., Minneapolis Heart Institute Foundation (Minneapolis, MN), and Holly's cardiologist, HCM affects one in 500 people and is the most common cause of sudden death in young people. "We lose 120 athletes per year to sudden cardiac arrest. That's one athlete every three days." Dr. Maron says that while there are nuances about liability, for the most part, the cardiology community supports the efforts of privatized screening. "The work Holly and A Heart for Sports is doing not only raises much needed awareness, but also provides another opportunity to pick up diseases and defects that may otherwise go undetected." Holly credits Dr. Maron, who is on the AHFS Advisory Board, for saving her life and changing her family's legacy. "HCM doesn't have to be a death sentence. High-risk patients like Holly, can have implantable defibrillators and go on to lead normal, active lives. The key is early detection."

Holly agrees. "Often times when I'm asked to speak on the subject, I am greeted with compassion and empathy. And while I'm appreciative of the kind words, I tell folks that my family is fortunate because we are now aware of our genetic make-up. When my father's three-year-old sister died in 1956, the technology and knowledge to address HCM didn't exist. Three generations, six deaths and three survivors later, our family is smarter, stronger and healthier than ever before. That's because we now have the technology to detect, diagnose and treat HCM. My two cousins and I are proof."

Holly says the most important message she tells parents is that no matter how healthy a child seems, or how many sports physicals the child passes, cardiac testing with an ECG and echo ultrasound is the surest way to detect HCM. "People who die from SCA are dying in vain. The key to saving their lives is public awareness, education and early detection." Holly credits Philips Medical Systems with helping her meet AHFS's objectives. "Without Philips' generous support, we would not be able to hold our screenings. Philips, through its Save an Athlete program, loans us state-of-the-art imaging equipment, including both echo ultrasound and ECG machines. The technology, combined with our clinicians' expertise, has allowed us to uncover numerous conditions during our screening events. In fact, one of the student athletes who attended our last screening discovered that he had HCM."

Businesswoman and mother, Pat Sims, can't help but wish that it had been her son. "In December 2002, my family and I traveled to watch a high school basketball game. One of the players collapsed on the court. We were all shocked and stayed in our seats while the EMS team tried to revive him. I remembered looking around for his mother; realizing that she wasn't there. I shuddered to think about the phone call she was going to receive. Four months later, I was away on business and I got a phone call. They told me that my son had died from sudden cardiac arrest due to HCM, a congenital heart defect we never knew he had." Victor Sims Jr., was 18 years old when he died. A high-profile high school athlete, he made history as he led his basketball team to a state championship. His mom says he was looking forward to college and had his eye on a career in the NBA. "When Victor passed, he got a lot of media attention, which really did a lot to bring attention to sudden cardiac arrest and the need for cardiovascular screening among high school athletes," recalls Ms. Sims. "Within 15 days of Victor passing, another young man died from SCA, four months later another mother's son died; within 18 months we lost six kids from our community to SCA. I can't help thinking that if I had known four months earlier the cause of that young basketball player's death, I would have had my son tested; but no one knew."

"I lost my son to HCM in April 2003," says Pat. "I started working with Holly a few months later. At first we emailed, then we met in person. The next thing I knew we were organizing A Heart for Sports events on the East Coast. I am now out promoting and raising awareness for cardiac screening and early detection. It's organizations like A Heart for Sports and Philips Save an Athlete program that will make it possible for our kids to have the early testing they need so we don't keep losing them to diseases that are treatable."

Kevin Purcell, father of Nate, agrees. "In our case, if Nate had had one cardiac

screening, one ECG in a timely manner, we would be telling a different story." Nate was 14 years old when he passed away March 28, 2001, after falling victim to SCA brought on by Wolf-Parkinson-White syndrome. "It took five years for someone to finally diagnose our son's disease. He was scheduled for cardiac ablation but died before we made it to the hospital," says Kevin, who is currently lobbying to get Philips HeartStart Defibrillators in the local school system. "Losing a child never gets any easier, but I do have hope that the work Holly and AHFS are doing will make a difference. Even if it's saving just one kid, it's worth it."

Holly says she draws her inspiration and strength from families like the Sims and the Purcells. "I am so blessed to know these people. They have been through so much, much more than I will ever go through. Their positive attitudes and willingness to share their stories, hoping they might help someone else is the human heart at its strongest."

Not one to sit still, Holly is also Associate Director for Center of Cardiovascular Wellness (CCW). "By partnering with CCW we can now provide affordable cardiac screening programs to the general public," says Holly. "This is great for the kid who's detected through one of the A Heart for Sports screening events. Because cardiac conditions often run in families, including HCM, it's important to have other families members tested. Now family members can go to CCW and have the life-saving screenings they need at a reasonable and affordable cost."

To learn more about A Heart for Sports, the Center of Cardiovascular Wellness, the Loyola Marymount University cardiac screening event and other scheduled screenings, email Holly at heartforsports@aol.com, or call 1.888.509.4278.

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