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## Daughter's spirit drives Beach family to fight for cure

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By Rita Frankenberry

The Virginian-Pilot  
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VIRGINIA BEACH

Ginny Pritchett always knew her daughter Morgan had an indomitable spirit.

Her sense of determination revealed itself early on, her mom said, recalling a day when Morgan was 2, and playing with her mom's hair. Morgan was struggling to snap a barrette shut but she was undeterred. Finally, after managing to get it closed, she spoke her first sentence.

"She said, 'I did it,'" Ginny Pritchett recalled.

Her resolve was something everyone became aware of after 5-year-old Morgan was diagnosed with an inoperable brain tumor in October 2007. She had a diffuse pontine glioma, a highly aggressive form of brain cancer, and wasn't given a promising prognosis.

"We were only given a 10 percent survival rate beyond one year," Ginny Pritchett said. "We were basically told we had about six to nine months."

Remarkably, Morgan endured nearly two years of clinical trials and medications.

"She was very much a fighter," her mom said. "She had a determination beyond anything."

It wasn't until 20 months after diagnosis – on June 30, 2009, that Morgan finally lost her courageous battle with brain cancer. She was just days from her seventh birthday.

To honor their daughter's memory and raise money for research, Morgan's parents started a Virginia chapter of The Cure Starts Now in September.

The national nonprofit, which raises money for pediatric brain cancer research, is only 2 years old but has already raised more than \$400,000 for research and experimental treatments.

Currently, Ginny Pritchett said, the organization has 13 state chapters, but they are hoping more states will sign on in the coming months so the nonprofit can qualify for federal funding for research projects.

To help with that goal, the Virginia Beach family has organized two local fundraisers in honor of Morgan, with all proceeds going to The Cure Starts Now.

On April 17, a Bridge Party will be held at the Oceanfront. Morgan's grandmother, Judith Pritchett, organized the event and is hoping it will raise awareness, as well as funding for pediatric brain cancer research.

"Only two hospitals are studying this type of inoperable brain tumor," Judith Pritchett said.

She decided to hold a Bridge Party in honor of Morgan because she often gave her bridge winnings to her young granddaughter.

"It's for the kids Morgan met," Judith Pritchett added, "and for other kids we don't know. I want to help children with this tumor."

Morgan's parents, Ginny and David Pritchett, are also in the midst of planning their first major fundraiser for the Virginia chapter of The Cure Starts Now.

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They are organizing a May 14 golf tournament, On Course Fore A Cure, at Cedar Point Country Club in Suffolk. The couple hopes the event will raise between \$35,000 to \$50,000 to fund pediatric brain cancer research.

Since losing their daughter last year, Ginny Pritchett said there are days when she struggles to get out of bed. But then she remembers Morgan and how the tumor began to affect her daughter's movement, walking and speech as it progressed.

Morgan adjusted, her mom said, even when she was no longer able to use her right hand.

"She was an artist and she loved to color and draw," Ginny Pritchett said. "She very quickly started using her left hand. This child was a perfectionist and she never once complained or even got frustrated. As she lost the ability to do something, she just adapted."

"She was my hero," she added. "If there's a day I don't want to get out of bed, I think of her perseverance and think if she could do it, I can do it."

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