

"Sisters" to donate hair in support of cancer patients

Big Brothers, Big Sisters mentor and Little Sister bond through volunteerism

Regina Young

Janice Solkov and her "little sister" do just about everything that "siblings" commonly do as a pair. They play games; visit museums; attend plays; make food; dabble in arts and crafts.

On May 12, the duo will even get haircuts together.

As soon as Tiara is finished with school next Thursday, she and Solkov will head on over to Middle Bucks Institute of Technology in Jamison, where members of the cosmetology program will lock off 10 inches of her hair. Dr. Solkov and Tiara recently made the decision to donate their long locks to one of two organizations that make wigs for cancer patients.

"I know how much my wig meant to me," the New Hope resident said. "It really helped me to feel better about the way I looked."

For Solkov, a breast cancer survivor, the cause is already close to heart, but Tiara's decision to donate her hair gives Thursday's event added meaning. That's because while Solkov and Tiara do indeed enjoy a close relationship, their sisterhood is not predicated on genetics or a shared upbringing.

Solkov is a volunteer with Big Brothers Big Sisters of Bucks County, a nonprofit organization that serves to empower children by facilitating positive relationships with adult mentors, or "Bigs." Tiara, a fifth-grader, is Solkov's "Little Sister."

Solkov, who is bilingual, has been in the Puerto Rican girl's life for three and a half years, and over the course of this time, has developed a strong connection with Tiara. They participate in a number of positive activities, includ-



Big Brothers Big Sisters mentor Janice Solkov and her Little Sister, Tiara, are donating their hair in support of women undergoing cancer treatment. The duo will have their long locks cut on May 12 at Middle Bucks Institute of Technology, where Solkov served as chair of the executive council in 2010 and 2011.

ing Big Brothers Big Sisters fundraisers, library programs and special holiday events like trick-or-treating. Solkov has also taken Tiara horseback riding, to the beach and to the YMCA, where

the girl has played in soccer games.

Solkov has not only grown close to her "Little," but with the girl's family.

"Her family is very supportive

and her mom definitely wants to make sure that all of her children get the best education that they can get. Her mom is wonderful," she said.

"They are an amazingly wonderful family."

Tiara, said Solkov, is a proficient speller who is both curious and bright. "She wants to take everything in," she said, "... and she's always interested in doing her best."

In addition to encouraging Tiara's academic development, Solkov talks to her Little about the social challenges of building positive friendships at school, the importance of setting and meeting goals, and the value of doing well in a school.

As a mentor, Solkov also promotes volunteerism and tries to set a good example by demonstrating "the value of being a giving person."

Tiara has helped Solkov take care of foster kittens and dogs; together they've painted tiles for a library mural and stuffed bags with personal care items for the clients of A Woman's Place, Bucks County's domestic violence organization.

When Solkov asked Tiara if she'd like to donate her hair, the girl was eager to help women in their battle against cancer, though Solkov's personal connection to cancer had little — if any — influence on Tiara's decision.

"I don't think she is really aware of the fact that I had cancer," said Solkov, who said she prefers to keep visits with Tiara focused on the girl. "It is not about me," she stressed. "It's about her and our relationship."

Solkov was diagnosed with

breast cancer in October 2004. Her treatment plan consisted of a lumpectomy, a sentinel lymph node dissection, four rounds of chemotherapy and radiation every day for 32 weekdays, followed by five years of medication.

With the support of a close group of friends and her oncologist, Solkov weathered the physical and emotional challenges associated with cancer treatment, including the loss of her hair.

"After the first week of chemo, it [my hair] was fine," she recalled. "I thought this is great. Maybe I'll be the one person who doesn't lose her hair."

"But by the second week I'm seeing it on the pillow. Long hairs. Laying on my pillow."

Solkov, who was a York school principal at the time, utilized a wig during her cancer battle.

"To me, what was important on a day-to-day basis was the education of the children in the school," she said. "I didn't want to draw attention to myself or my situation, and I got a wig that was very close to the same style of hair."

It took about three years for Solkov's hair to grow out following treatment, and with her hair growing cascading down her back, she's ready to start part of that process over again — this time for a good cause. And right by her side will be her Little Sister, Tiara.

"Tiara is giving back and understanding the satisfaction you get from helping other people, from helping homeless animals, from helping women at shelters — realizing that it's part of being a good person and making a difference in small but meaningful ways," Solkov said.

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BCCC earns high marks as digitally savvy college

Bucks County Community College has been ranked third in the nationwide Digital Community Colleges Survey by the Center for Digital Education.

The survey, now in its 11th year, analyzes how community colleges use technology to improve services to students, faculty, staff and the community. Award winners demonstrated innovative uses, including online courses and mobile environments, mobile apps, secure platforms and wireless networks. Last year, Bucks ranked fourth nationwide.

"Technology permeates everything we do these days, and our job at Bucks is to make it all work for our students' success," said Bill Hemming, dean of Learning Resources and Online Learning at the two-year public college.

"Our high ranking among the larger community colleges attests to our commitment to a robust technological infrastructure and investment in emerging technologies," he added. "It also speaks to our creativity in using these tools

to provide innovative student and academic support services and engaging and effective learning environments."

Dr. Kecia Ray, executive director for the Center for Digital Education, recognized the top 10 colleges at a reception concurrent to the American Association of Community College's annual conference in April.

"This year's survey indicates that community colleges are making great strides in using data to improve decisions, providing professional development to assist faculty in the use of technology and creating robust online and mobile environments for their students," said Ray.

Bucks has two mobile apps that are free for students, and offers more than 200 online courses a year through its Virtual Campus. Support services such as reference librarians and tutors are also available through the Virtual Campus. The college also offers wireless internet at all three campuses.

Medical college, Blumberg Institute launch Master of Biomedical Sciences

The Commonwealth Medical College (TCMC) and the Baruch S. Blumberg Institute (BSBI) on April 2 celebrated the successful launch of their joint Master of Biomedical Sciences program being delivered at the Pennsylvania Biotechnology Center in Doylestown.

The program, announced in January, admitted its first class of 24 students who attended their orientation session on April 2. The initial goal for the first class was to admit between 12 and 15 students.

"The response to our new MBS degree has been astounding," said Scott Koerwer, TCMC's vice president for strategic initiatives and planning. "The chance to learn in a radically different arena — a biotech park populated by both entrepreneurs and scientists — certainly resonated with students who desire careers in biotechnology, pharmaceutical and life science companies or who want to burnish their applications to medical school. We are also delighted with the caliber of our students. They will be a credit to both TCMC and BSBI."

The next MBS class in Doylestown will begin in January of 2017. In the meantime, open house dates for the MBS program



Jennifer Boardman, associate professor of microbiology and immunology at The Commonwealth Medical College (TCMC) and John Kulp, director of academic affairs and assistant professor, computational chemistry, at the Baruch S. Blumberg Institute (BSBI), welcome the first class of master of biomedical science degree students. The first class of 24 students — a number that exceeded initial projections — began their studies in the program, delivered jointly by TCMC and BSBI, at the Pennsylvania Biotechnology Park this month.

at The Commonwealth Medical College in Scranton are set for 2 to 5 p.m. Wednesday, May 11; and 9 a.m. to noon Tuesday, June 7.

For information about either program, contact Jillian Golaszewski at 570-504-9659 or jGolaszewski@tcmc.edu.

PSBI carnival event benefits disabled children

Students in Pearl S. Buck International's High School Leadership program will host a carnival event 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. May 14.

The event will feature games,

music and family fun and takes place at PSBI, 520 Dublin Road, Perkasie.

The festival will raise money for developmentally disabled children in Vietnam.

CarFit series focuses on safety of older drivers

It's no secret that our bodies change as we age, and just as our bodies change, so does the way we drive.

Fatal crash rates rise drastically for older adults over the age of 70. So how do we help loved ones keep their independence and stay on the road?

St. Mary Medical Center's Regional Trauma Center is partner-

ing with the TMA Bucks County, the Mid-Atlantic Foundation for Safety and Education, American Society of Aging and AAA to answer that question with the upcoming CarFit Series Launch at St. Mary Medical Center on Thursday, May 5.

A CarFit check takes approximately 20 minutes to complete. CarFit will be held noon to 3 p.m.

May 5 at St. Mary Medical Center's Ambulance Garage, Langhorne.

The CarFit program offers older adults the opportunity to check how well their vehicles fit them. A team of trained technicians and St. Mary Emergency Medical Services health professionals work with each participant to ensure they fit their vehicle properly for maximum comfort and safety.

DelVal takes fourth at Soil Judging nationals

The Delaware Valley University Soil Judging Team took

fourth place overall at the National Collegiate Soil Judging

Contest, which was hosted by Kansas State University this April.

This is the highest finish the university has had since 1971. A total of 23 schools qualified to compete in the contest.

Individually, Dave Spadafora, Class of 2016, finished in 10th; Sam Todd, Class of 2016, finished in 14th place; Anthony Collora, Class of 2017, finished in 21st; and Alexandra Schmidt, Class of 2017, finished in 24th place. Contributing in the group judging competition were Kelsey Allen, Class of 2018; Emily Ball, Class of 2016; and Kate Hagar, Class of 2016.

DelVal has been involved in Soil Judging since the '60s. Steve Dadio of the Department of Landscape Architecture and Environmental Sciences currently teaches soil judging.

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