

All the way up for Logan

Abbott analyst puts his heart into Sunday's 94-floor Hancock climb

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GRAYSLAKE -- While Ken Zelen of Grayslake is climbing to the 94th story of the John Hancock Center on Sunday, he will be carrying the memory of a little boy with a big smile -- his son Logan Scott.

Logan, who loved McDonald's and dancing with the Wiggles, died in 2006, two weeks before his second birthday. Zelen is honoring his only child -- whose smile drew happy comments from friends and strangers -- by participating in the 11th annual Hustle Up the Hancock stair climb, which raises money for lung disease research.



Ken Zelen and his son, Logan Scott Zelen, in a photo taken in 2005. Kenneth will be running up 94 floors of the Hancock Building on Sunday in memory of Logan who died of a heart ailment. (Special to the News-Sun)

"When you're climbing to the top of that building, you're pretty close to heaven," Zelen said. "It's a way to be close to him."

Logan had difficulty breathing from birth. Doctors suspected allergies and treated him for asthma, but his health worsened.

"We were at the doctors all the time," Zelen said. "He always had a cold. We knew something wasn't right. He was scheduled to see a top pulmonologist -- a guy who had been on 'Oprah.'"

On the Saturday morning before Easter 2006, Ken and his wife, Jessica, discovered that Logan had died in his sleep. His condition was finally diagnosed as EFE, endocardial fibroelastosis, a rare heart disorder characterized by the thickening of the muscular lining of the heart chambers.

"I just want his death to stand for something," said Zelen, 37, a business analyst for Abbott Laboratories. "I want to do something for someone else so they don't have to go through this same experience."

Zelen's almost daily workouts at Cardinal Fitness in Round Lake Beach have helped him cope with grief. He uses a Stairmaster to train for the vertical race at the Hancock, in which the fastest climbers will sprint up the 1,632 steps in under 10 minutes.

More than 2,300 participants -- 2,765 climbers are expected -- said they or their families have been touched by a form of lung disease, typically lung cancer, asthma or emphysema. More than 600 climbers are former-smokers.

"For many people it's how fast you can climb, for others it's a personal dream to make it to the top, but for everyone it's a way to help reduce the burden of lung disease that strikes a million people throughout the Greater Chicago area," said race director Gina Schwieger.

Those wishing to help sponsor Zelen's climb may visit www.lungchicago.org and click on search/sponsor a climber.

Zelen, who said he wants to help save other children, is close raising his goal of \$1,500.

"We hope to raise as much as we can," Zelen said, noting that donations will be accepted through March.