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A WEEKLY FOCUS ON POSITIVE NEWS IN TROUBLED TIMES

SARAH COOK has been dealing with cancer for nine years, but, says her dad, she's 'always smiling.'
 And her 'little fund' to help other patients and their families has mushroomed

TORCHBEARER WITH A MISSION

BRENDA BRANSWELL
 GAZETTE EDUCATION REPORTER

Sarah Cook's stretch of the Olympic torch relay is about 300 metres on St. Denis St.

She'll be walking, not running, in the white track suit, white hat and red mitts that arrived by courier.

"One leg is shorter, so I have a little bit of a limp," said Sarah, 17, curled up on a couch in her family's Town of Mount Royal home.

Her fibula, a bone in the lower leg, was removed when she was first diagnosed with Ewing's Sarcoma at 8 years old.

"I've never been the fastest runner in the world," said Sarah with a laugh.

She'll be having a busy week when she carries the torch on Thursday, Dec. 10. On the Monday, she has a chemotherapy session to treat the cancer that has returned. On Tuesday and Wednesday, she has two end-of-term exams at Lower Canada College, where she is a pre-university student.

"I'm excited," she said. "I really hope I don't drop the torch."

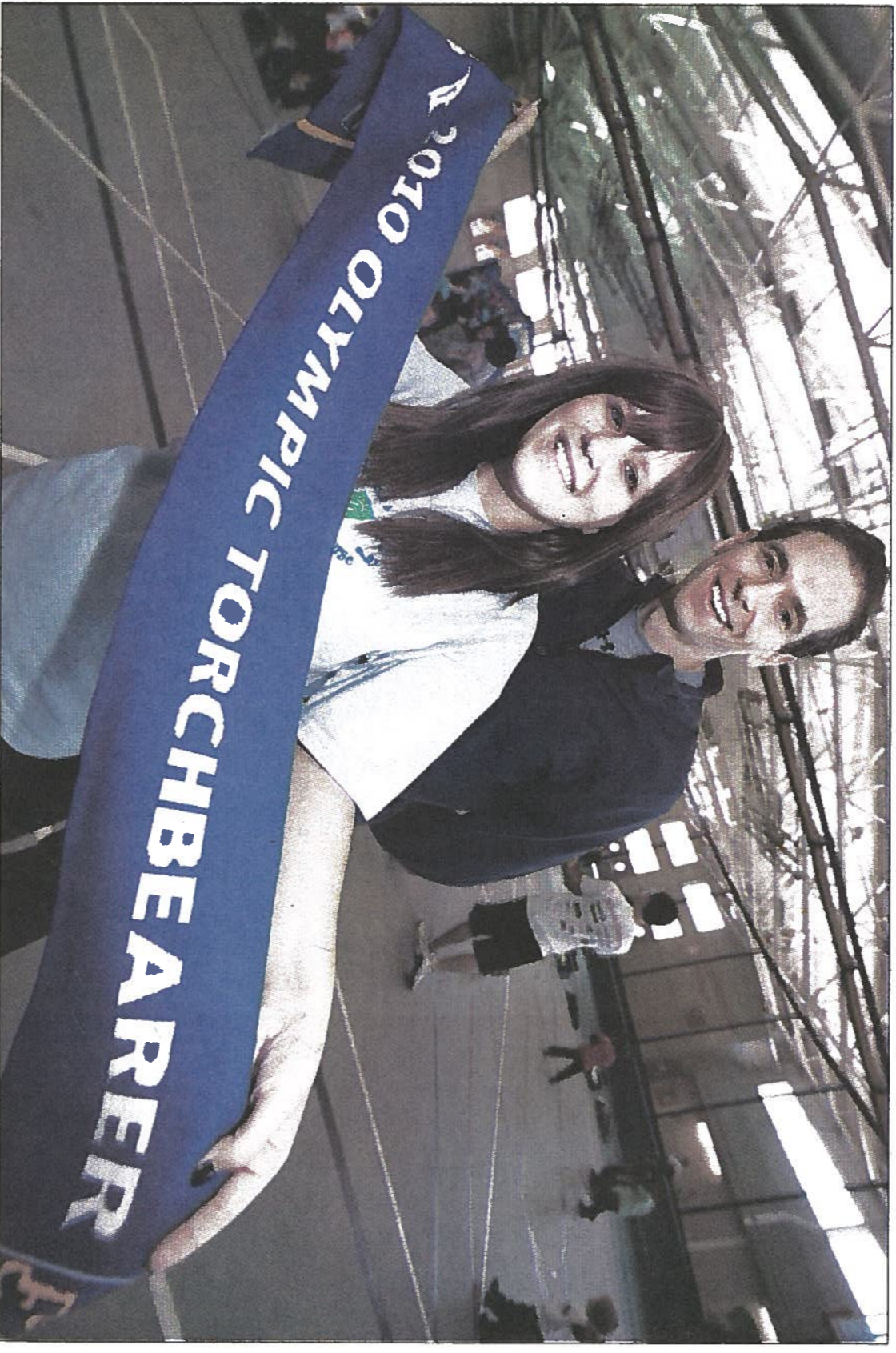
Sarah learned last summer soon after her high school graduation that the cancer had come back. "It was definitely hard because I was really excited to go to Neuchâtel," she said of the junior college in Switzerland.

But you don't hear self-pity and why-me in her voice. She looked good late last week and laughed easily. Having been down this road before, Sarah said, she has learned to go with the flow.

"I've accepted the fact that 'OK, it's just one more year.' Things are put on hold. You can always do stuff later."

When she applied to be a torchbearer earlier this fall, she wrote about the Sarah Cook Fund of the Cedars Cancer Institute for Children.

It was set up by her parents, Lorena and Norman, after she first got sick. During her hospital stay then, Sarah found the pillows lumpy and wanted new ones for the kids



PETER McCABE THE GAZETTE
 Sarah Cook displays a scarf given to her by Alexandre Decary of RBC Capital Markets, at the McGill Sports Complex during the annual Splash and Dash event.

on the 8D floor at the Children's. But the fund blossomed far beyond the "little fund" to buy pillows that the family had envisioned.

It has raised more than \$4.5 million to date, through its own fundraising events like the annual "Splash & Dash" event held last month and also through Cedars.

The money from Sarah's Fund goes to the hematology/oncology division at the Children's.

"We couldn't say thank you enough to all these people for saving Sarah and all that they do for all these other families," said Lorena Cook.

The fund partnered with the Children's Hospital Foundation to renovate 8D,

which is now called "Sarah's Floor."

During Sarah's first bout with cancer, her mother stayed at the hospital with her during the day while her father spent nights there.

"At nighttime, Sarah and I would talk about what we could do to make it better," said Norman Cook. "And that was part of the conversations we had every night."

"So we made a list starting with pillows. And Sarah really wanted a better place for the parents to sleep because she'd see me crawl out of this chair in the morning."

The upgrades to Sarah's Floor include flat-screen televisions and sofas that extend into beds.

Patients have their own bathrooms, and some rooms have Internet connections with web cameras that families from out of town can use to call home.

The fund has also helped pay for an intraoperative MRI machine at the Children's - the first installed in a pediatric hospital in Canada. Its other contributions include annual donations for continuing education for nurses.

"It's amazing that we've been able to raise that much money. So many people are involved," Sarah said.

She has met cyclist and cancer survivor Lance Armstrong at fundraising events in Montreal. When he heard last summer that her cancer

had returned, Armstrong gave a shout-out to Sarah in a video posted on his website during the Tour de France.

"Sarah, we're thinking about you and hoping you do great," Armstrong said.

"I was really amazed that he even knew about it," Sarah said.

She watches lots of movies because she likes filmmaking and photography. "I'm also a big math person," said Sarah.

"I've been an honour roll student. Her average was above 85 per cent but "that went down the drain this year," she said.

Sarah said she tries to go to school as much as she can and wants to go away to university next year. "I find my-

self a lot more tired than usual," she said.

"But always smiling," chimed in her father. Sarah doesn't want to be "the child with cancer," said Lorena Cook.

"She is, but she continues to look outside herself to help others with cancer. And I think that's the core of what this is about ... (people) helping people."

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For more information about the Sarah Cook Fund of the Cedars Cancer Institute for Children, visit: http://www.cedars.ca/cedars/en/sarah_cook_fund/founder