

## TEENAGE CANCER PATIENT TRAVELS TO DISNEY WORLD FOR THE TRIP OF A LIFETIME

*Over 100 children and teens with serious illnesses experienced the magic of Disney World for a day.*

**SOMERSET, N.J. (May 30, 2017)** – Earlier this month, 100 pediatric patients, whose days are usually filled with treatments, checkups and doctors, were given the unique opportunity to venture to a very special place: Disney World. For one day, these kids could truly just be kids.

Each year, the Mercer County Chapter of the Sunshine Foundation in New Jersey sends over 100 seriously ill children ages 3 to 18 on a daylong excursion to Disney's Magic Kingdom, where they can explore, engage with one another, take in the sights and sounds, and just simply have fun.

The Mercer County Chapter of the Sunshine Foundation, an all-volunteer organization returning some 90 cents of each dollar back to the wishes and dreams of special children, spend each year helping to execute the trip of a lifetime for ill children who would otherwise be unable to partake in an excursion of this nature. Known as Operation Dreamlift and now in its 30th year, the program continues to make a tremendous impact in the lives of disadvantaged children. One member of this year's Operation Dreamlift group was former ProCure Proton Therapy Center New Jersey patient Ben Lepisto, who was last year diagnosed with medulloblastoma, the most common malignant brain tumor seen in children.

### **Ben's Cancer Journey**

As an active teen, diligent student and recent high school baseball recruit from Woodbridge, NJ, 15-year-old Ben had his sights set on excelling in academics and sports. But then Ben began experiencing fatigue that both persisted and worsened, especially noticeable during baseball practice. His parents grew concerned about this unusual health pattern. Ben then developed blurred eyesight, which ultimately forced him to pull back from playing baseball and a number of other sports he was pursuing.

After several blood tests and a biopsy, Ben and his parents learned the news that no family ever wants to hear: Ben had a brain tumor. The family was immediately catalyzed into action. Ben's father, Matt Lepisto, consulted a friend who worked at Saint Peter's University Hospital on next steps and where to obtain the best resources. Shortly thereafter, Ben underwent surgery to have the tumor removed. Sadly, in late summer of last year, the Lepisto family learned that Ben's cancer had metastasized to his lymph nodes.

Still, the family didn't give up hope. "At the time, Ben was being considered for a clinical study, but since his cancer had metastasized, which was pretty rare for his case and circumstances, the oncology department at Saint Peter's recommended a different treatment option," recalls Ben's father. Determined to treat his cancer as effectively as possible, Ben was referred to ProCure Proton Therapy Center in Somerset, NJ where he would go on to receive proton therapy.

Proton therapy is an advanced form of radiation that destroys cancer cells by preventing them from dividing and growing, but unlike standard X-ray radiation, it uses protons – positively charged sub-atomic

particles – to precisely target tumors. Proton therapy reduces the risk of damage to healthy tissue and organs near a cancerous tumor, which is particularly important for a young man like Ben whose brain is still developing. Further, because of its laser-like precision, proton therapy potentially allows patients to receive higher, more effective doses of radiation, but with fewer side effects.

“Being treated at ProCure NJ was a great experience for me and my family. Nobody wants to undergo cancer treatment, but if you have to go through this, ProCure is the place to be. Everyone at the Center treated me with such kindness, and I really felt taken care of,” Ben reflects.

### **The Trip of a Lifetime**

On the morning of the trip, Ben and his Operation Dreamlift cohort were treated like celebrities: they were escorted onto their private airplane at Mercer County Airport by police officers, and the tarmac was lined with volunteers dressed as Disney characters. The excitement among children and families was palpable.

“For many young cancer patients who undergo daily treatment, it’s easy to feel far away from their normal selves. With their regimen turned upside down, these patients aren’t able to, for a certain period, partake in the typical teenage or childhood activities,” explains Brian Chon, MD, Medical Director at ProCure NJ. “We’re so thrilled that Ben was able to participate in a day that was filled with such joy.”

For Ben, it was a magical experience in the kingdom of magic: “I was really grateful to be part of Operation Dreamlift. Being at Disney was really fun, and what I enjoyed most was being able to meet other kids like me, to just have a normal conversation with people who are fighting a similar battle.”

### **Looking Forward**

Ben will return to Woodbridge High School in the fall to begin his junior year on time, thanks to homeschooling, effective cancer treatment and a lot of persistence.

“I’m excited that I’ll be able to stay on track with school and start getting involved in activities again,” Ben gushes. “I was really determined to fight my battle against cancer so I can continue doing the things I love. For any other kids going through sickness or struggles, my message is simple: stay driven and stay hopeful.”

If you or someone you love is considering proton therapy for cancer, call 1-877-267-7891 or request more information online at: [www.procure.com/nj](http://www.procure.com/nj). The team will help you learn more about proton therapy and find out if it is right for you.

### **About Princeton ProCure Management, LLC.**

ProCure Proton Therapy Center in Somerset, N.J. opened in March 2012, and was the 10th proton treatment facility in the nation and the first in the NJ/NY tri-state region. Studies have shown proton therapy to be effective in treating many types of cancers, including that of the prostate, breast, lung, brain, gastrointestinal system, head and neck region, sarcomas and many pediatric cases.

ProCure N.J. is the only proton therapy center in the metro NY/NJ area equipped with pencil beam scanning (PBS), the most advanced proton therapy technology available today. ProCure’s PBS technology expands the center’s ability to treat difficult and complicated tumors, and is reflective of a commitment to continually advance cancer treatment options. For more information, visit [www.procure.com/nj](http://www.procure.com/nj).