

{LOCAL SUCCESS} ——— :: *christopher stuckey*



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Leukemia has always been a very personal topic for Christopher Stuckey. When he was just a boy, his father died of acute myeloid leukemia. On March 22nd of this year, Stuckey was able to strike a blow against the disease by raising almost \$12,000 by kiteboarding across Lake Pontchartrain.

Stuckey, an Evansville, Indiana native and a naval architecture and marine engineering student at the University of New Orleans, received an email from the dean of the engineering program about a leukemia fundraising party. The email got Stuckey’s immediate attention because of his father. At the party, he heard about the 2009 Leukemia Cup Regatta and an idea immediately came to him: he would raise money by kiteboarding across Lake Pontchartrain.

Having spent five years kiteboarding and having taught the sport at a school in the Outer Banks, Stuckey knew he had the chops to complete the task. He just had to get permission to do it (the Leukemia Cup Regatta typically involves sailing, not kiteboarding). “They didn’t understand it at first, but they eventually thought it was a great idea,” Stuckey said. Stuckey had a goal of raising \$10,000 but exceeded that goal, reaching approximately \$12,000.

There were some challenges the day of the event. “I was a little bit nervous in the morning because we didn’t have ideal winds,” Stuckey said.

Typically, a kiteboarder will want winds of over 15 miles per hour for smooth sailing. And that morning, the winds were less than 15 miles per hour. More complications ensued when Stuckey went to his traditional launch spot along Lake Pontchartrain, and saw to his dismay that it was blocked off because the Corps of Engineers was working on the levee.

Undaunted, Stuckey climbed the fence and took his equipment with him. However, he was noticed by a police officer, who shouted for Stuckey to leave the area immediately. Stuckey tried to explain, but the officer became agitated and again told him to leave. Fortunately, a friend of Stuckey who had accompanied him to the spot told the officer that Stuckey was doing it to raise money for leukemia and lymphoma research. Upon hearing this, the officer told them that his son had lymphoma. He immediately went back to his megaphone and said, “Launch from this area now!”

The light winds made things challenging for Stuckey at first, but once he made it about halfway across the lake, the winds picked up. As he progressed, the lake became choppy, with some heavy rolling waves providing an additional challenge for Stuckey. After close to an hour and a half on the lake, Stuckey reached the finish line to find a crowd of people waiting, including his mother.

Reflecting on the event, Stuckey says the crossing of the lake was the easiest part. “The hardest part was to get people to listen to me and take me seriously. A lot of people thought it was a stunt at first,” Stuckey said. “It was rewarding to get this much money raised in such a difficult economic time.”

Aside from raising money to combat the disease that killed his father, Stuckey found it immensely rewarding because it allowed him to get to know his father better. A TV news crew from Evansville covered the event and after the segment aired on the local news, Stuckey received numerous calls and emails from people who knew his father. They told him stories of what a valued friend his father was to people in the Evansville community. “I got to learn a lot about my dad that I otherwise would have never known,” Stuckey said.

While Stuckey enjoyed crossing Lake Pontchartrain, he has even bigger dreams for next year. Now a recent graduate of UNO, he has been interviewing for jobs in Holland. For next year, he would like to do a fundraising kiteboarding trip across the English Channel. Whatever happens, he wants to continue using his kiteboarding talents to raise money to fight leukemia.

“This has been the most rewarding experience I’ve ever been involved with,” Stuckey said.