

Hot Rod Charlie and How Partnerships Move Melanoma Research Forward

To honor a father and uncle lost to skin cancer, owners of racehorse Hot Rod Charlie put part of his winnings toward melanoma research.

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“This is bigger than us,” says Patrick O’Neill. “This is a movement, and we want young people to get involved in melanoma prevention and early detection.”

At just 29 years old, Patrick is an unlikely partner in the fight against melanoma. Especially since it is completely off the radar of most people his age. But he’s set out to change that.

Alongside him are his best friends and business colleagues Alex, Dan, Eric, and Reiley. Together they make up Boat Racing LLC and are partial owners of horseracing’s very-own Cinderella story “Hot Rod Charlie.”

Members of Boat Racing LLC, partial owners of racehorse Hot Rod Charlie

Courtesy of Melanoma Research Alliance

Owning a racehorse began as a way for Patrick and his friends to stay in touch and continue the camaraderie they shared in college. What they hadn't expected was for their horse, Hot Rod Charlie, to run the Triple Crown and now the Breeder's Cup. Nor could they have predicted the visibility that Hot Rod Charlie would bestow upon their group.

"We've been so blessed," says Patrick, "and we felt as a team that we wanted to do something bigger and beyond ourselves." That something turned out to be a partnership with MRA in honor of Patrick's late father and uncle, both of whom passed away from melanoma.

One-sixth of Hot Rod Charlie's winnings now go to MRA—and as Boat Racing LLC's stable of other horses grows, they too will contribute winnings towards melanoma research.

The one-sixth donation represents something deeper for the team. The sixth man is a basketball

metaphor for the first man off the bench — the unsung hero — the one you tag in for that extra spark to go from good to great. It represents Patrick's father and uncle.

Taking advantage of this opportunity as well as their unique networks, Patrick and his partners have tapped into social media, hosted events and pre-race day get togethers, worn MRA-branded masks at the Kentucky Derby, and sought to turn their spotlight onto melanoma awareness. "Melanoma is one of those diseases that if you catch it early, it can drastically reduce the issues you may suffer later in life," says Patrick. "What we bring to the table is reaching a younger demographic. If we can get through to them now by helping them understand this disease and how to take precautions to protect themselves, then we feel like we're providing a unique value."

As Boat Racing LLC's relationship with MRA has grown, Patrick and his partners have sought to learn more about MRA's operations, including a visit to Washington, DC where they had the opportunity to meet with and listen to researchers who are impacting the melanoma field. "We could not be prouder to be partnered with MRA and to be associated with what the group represents," says Patrick. "We are excited for what will transpire in the future."

It's a partnership that Patrick says his father would be proud of.

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