

**BREAKING** I-95 ramp at Gateway still closed; driver in wreck was shot



VENUS

## Wellington girl, 10, who can't walk or speak, getting 'magic' wheelchair



Alexandra Seltzer - Palm Beach Post Staff Writer  
2:09 p.m Tuesday, Feb. 7, 2017 Filed in Local News



VIEW CAPTION

BOYNTON BEACH — Born with a developmental disorder, 10-year-old Emma Pietrafesa relies on a scooter to move around and a feeding tube to eat.

And she can't speak, so Emma can't talk to her mom about her father's recent death. [Paul Pietrafesa](#), 48, died from pancreatic cancer on Nov. 23, 11 years to the day he started his full-time career with the Coral Springs Fire Department.

"She knows he's not around, but she looks for him," Emma's mom Karen said. "She doesn't have the concept of death."

**Read: Club teaching Boynton boys to hold doors and 'perfect gentlemen' skills**



How to Understand the Major Investment Trends of 2017

ADVERTISER CONTENT: Wells Fargo

Emma rolls her scooter to the room where her father's hospice bed was positioned in their Wellington home and sits there. She also lingers in front of his favorite spot on the couch.

Karen has her own way of communicating with her daughter — she understands Emma's facial expressions and what Emma means when she waves her left pointer.

Still, Karen wishes she could know what Emma thinks, even for just a moment — especially this weekend. Emma will ride in a wheelchair created just for her that looks like her father's favorite car, a 2010 Camaro, and lead Boynton Beach's annual Barrier Free 5K Run, Walk & Roll.

"For that brief moment everything is going to be OK," Karen said while looking at Emma. "He's going to be there in spirit. You get to shine. And it's for a good cause."

The event at [Congress Avenue Barrier Free Park](#) benefits the park designed with the needs of disabled children and adults in mind. The race is Saturday. The wheelchair, which was built by the city's project manager Kevin Ramsey and city police officer Wilmer Rodriguez, will be unveiled Friday night.

"We felt this was a family that really use a little magic in their life," said Wally Majors, the city's director of parks and recreation.

Lori Wilkinson, who taught Emma for eight years at Royal Palm School, suggested the young girl be the honorary starter.

"It just seemed like a good opportunity to bring a smile to a family that could use one," Wilkinson said.

In addition to raising awareness about Boynton's park, Wilkinson said the event gives the Pietrafesa family a chance to raise awareness about pancreatic cancer and Emma's disorder, Cornelia de Lange Syndrome, also known as CdLS.

The genetic disorder causes a range of physical, cognitive and medical challenges, and is estimated to occur once in every 10,000 births, according to [cdlsusa.org](#).

Emma attends [Atlantic Academy](#) in Coral Springs with her 12-year-old brother Anthony, who has autism. To help Emma, speech and physical therapists come to the house. She also has a nurse, Jennifer Brown-Reid, who calls Emma her "princess."

Brown-Reid said she's thankful someone is recognizing Emma. Some look at her like she's not normal, Brown-Reid said. She is, she said, she's just a little different.

"These kids are a lot of the times forgotten," she said.

*For information and to register for the race, visit [RAPB.COM/5K](#)*



VIEW COMMENTS 0