A heroine of her own story

By Richard Price
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The home videos streamed on a local TV news report told the story of Julie Flynn.
She was always laughing and smiling in every photo and clip. If she wasn’t doing that, she was doing a happy dance — even on a ski slope.

Her best friend, Maggie Warfield and Maggie’s teenage daughter, Rosie, described Flynn as full of life and a role model who always rose above the fray.

All of this while Flynn lived most of her life with Von Hippel-Lindau Syndrome, a hereditary condition associated with tumors arising in multiple organs. On March 27, Flynn lost her battle at age 43 to VHL but she always remained positive and never felt sorry for herself.

Rosie, as part of a middle school community service project, decided to pull together the Festival of Hope fundraiser held last Saturday at Grafton High to benefit the VHL Alliance.

Rosie told Charter Channel 7 that Flynn, who was also her guidance counselor, was like an aunt to her and someone she admired.

“She is the heroine of her own story,” said Rosie.

Last Saturday, there were dozens of local vendors on hand with a steady stream of customers, friends and supporters. By the latest count, the day raised over $15,000, Maggie Warfield said.

The turnout was not a surprise because Flynn touched many lives. A Grafton High graduate from the Class of 1992, Flynn became the middle school’s adjustment counselor after earning two college degrees followed by a stint working in the Office of Worcester District Attorney Joseph Early, Jr. and then teaching in a corrections institution.

Flynn did not let anything get in her way of giving to all she knew, her family said in a memorial. “Hope was Julie’s continual driving force which allowed her to treat her illness as a minor hindrance,” it read. “For everyone that had the privilege of meeting Julie, they came away knowing their life was better for having known her. She brought sunshine and brightness to every situation she faced.”

In May, during Every Day Heroes — an award ceremony celebrating those who support students with special needs — Flynn was posthumously recognized for her contributions in what was the most moving part of the evening.

On Saturday, there were dozens of local vendors from chocolatiers to yoga studies to artisans and everything in between. There was also a flood of raffle baskets donated by local businesses plus bouncy houses and cotton candy to give the day a carnival-like feel.

(A) heartfelt thanks go out to the countless friends and businesses that graciously donated raffle baskets, gift certificates, and made monetary donations; as well as to the vendors who secured a spot at the festival,” said the Flynn, Dunn and Warfield families in an open letter.