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Family, community are rallying around a feisty 17-year-old.

By Melissa Dribben

Inquirer Staff Writer

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The last argument Ashley Zauflik had with her dad was over her boom box.

"She loves to play it loud," Paul Zauflik recalled yesterday. "Really loud."

Early this month, he got out of bed and banged on her bedroom door, warning that if she didn't turn it down, he was going to take it away. "By the fourth time, I walked in, found her dancing in front of the mirror, and I disconnected the wires so the speakers didn't work."

The next morning, he found, "she'd busted the radio to pieces."

Normally this dustup, like so many others he's had with his feisty 17-year-old daughter, would have been quickly forgotten. But a few days later, Ashley, a junior at Pennsbury High School, was critically injured when a school bus ran over her on the Lower Bucks campus.

Now, every memory of Ashley has taken on outside importance.

In the two weeks since the accident, Ashley's parents, her two younger sisters, and scores of relatives and loyal friends have maintained a constant, crowded and spirited vigil at the Hospital of the University of Pennsylvania, where she remains heavily sedated and in critical condition. She has undergone nine surgeries, including one yesterday.

"For the first eight days, we slept on the floors or took turns in the reclining chairs in the waiting room with other parents," Zauflik said. "We've met a lot of families who are going through the same kind of thing. Their kids have everything from gunshot wounds to bike accidents."

The 45-year-old auto-body worker had to raise his voice to be heard above the din in the Morrisville shopping center parking lot where he stood, shivering. He was there to thank the hundreds of well-wishers from communities in southeastern Bucks County.

There can be no counterbalance for any parent in a situation like this. Yet along with the pain and grief as they wait and pray and wait and worry and wait and wait for their daughter to be stable enough to speak to them, the

Zaufliks have been inundated by the generosity, care and love of their neighbors in Fairless Hills and nearby towns.

Yesterday, crowds descended on Original's Pizza, whose owners, Sal and Suzanne Matarese, donated half the day's proceeds to the Zauflik family.

A radio station had set up a table out front and was broadcasting - at a decibel level that Ashley would have appreciated - the play-by-play of the high school football team's pizza-eating contest.

"Ten more pizzas or 15?" asked Bill Rednor, the WBCB-AM sales representative who helped organize the contest. In response, he got a full-mouthed murmur. "OK. Twenty more!"

Ashley's friend Lauren Renson and Lauren's aunt Wendy Sandy were selling sweatshirts and T-shirts with a picture of Ashley on the front and "Our Hero" on the back.

Several students, including another girl injured by the runaway bus, went up to Zauflik to ask about Ashley. He hugged them. They had stood outside the local Wal-Mart for two days and collected \$8,000.

"It's one of those situations where you can't express it," Zauflik said, his eyes tearing up.

The Bucks County Courier Times this week ran a list of money-raising efforts. A fund was established at Eleanor Roosevelt Elementary School in Morrisville, where Ashley's mother works as a teacher's aide. Coworkers at Wings to Go, where Ashley used to work, are selling ribbons. Breanna Loncosky, a ninth grader at Maple Point Middle School, and her little sister, Kimberly, are making and selling bows. The employees of Tire City in Bristol set up a collection box, and the store will match all donations.

"We got a message on our answering machine," Zauflik said. "Some contractor offered to build us an addition to the house for free if we needed for Ashley when she comes home."

Green-eyed with close-cut gray hair and wearing jeans, a white T-shirt, and a black leather jacket, he stood in the cold, graciously accepting hugs and well wishes from Pennsbury students and their parents and gently parrying questions about her progress.

"She's good today," he said.

After one woman whispered to him how much one of her fund-raising efforts had yielded, he shook his head, disbelieving. "Who would have ever thought that all this would be for Ashley?"

The outpouring might stem, in part, from the nature of the community: neat streets of ranch houses, high school bleachers packed for games, and families who have lived here for generations.

"It's a good place for kids to grow up," said Brian Gray, senior vice president of the Yardville National Bank, which sponsored the pizza-eating contest.

Gray, a 1981 graduate of Pennsbury High, said the Zaufliks' pain had pierced the protective veneer of every home in the region. "I have a daughter in the eighth grade who gets on a Pennsbury bus every day. You can't help but be moved."

Ashley's friends say she is "bubbly" and "fun" and "lights up a room." On her MySpace page, they have left messages, achingly sweet and sad, peppered with four-lettered rage at her fate.

"She likes music and she loves to dance," said Brittany Malcolm, 16, who said she and Ashley had been friends "since forever." Ashley also likes shopping at the nearby Oxford Valley Mall. Duh. A Hollister fan, it's said.

She has a mischievous streak, and once her parents caught her sneaking out of a window at night. They might not have known, however, about another escapade a few months ago when Ashley suddenly realized she needed a different outfit for school the next day. At 1:30 a.m., she called Brittany and asked whether she could borrow a shirt.

"I asked, 'When?' " Brittany recalled, "and she said, 'Right now!' I only live five doors down, so we ran outside, and I met her in the street to give it to her."

The oldest of the 14 cousins, Ashley loves horses almost as much as she does children.

"She is so great with kids," her aunt Jaime Aquilone said. "She's always baby-sitting the nieces and nephews."

That nurturing instinct fits with Ashley's wish to become a nurse, her dad said. And apparently, she has the coolness under pressure required for the job.

Last year, when Ashley was in the Poconos with her friend Lauren Renson, Lauren's 14-year-old brother fell off an all-terrain vehicle and severed a toe.

"She carried him to the house and kept him calm," said Wendy Sandy, the boy's aunt. "She took control."

Once the adults took over taking care of Kenny, Ashley went back into the woods. "She spent all day looking for his toe," Sandy said.

"I adore her."

This week, her parents and sisters have been watching Ashley's bedside monitors. "When the medications wear off, she opens her eyes and squeezes your hand," her father said. "I keep telling her, 'I'm going to get you a new radio.' "