

## Weekend a celebration of Kaitlyn

BY BARBARA BARKER  
barbara.barker@newsday.com

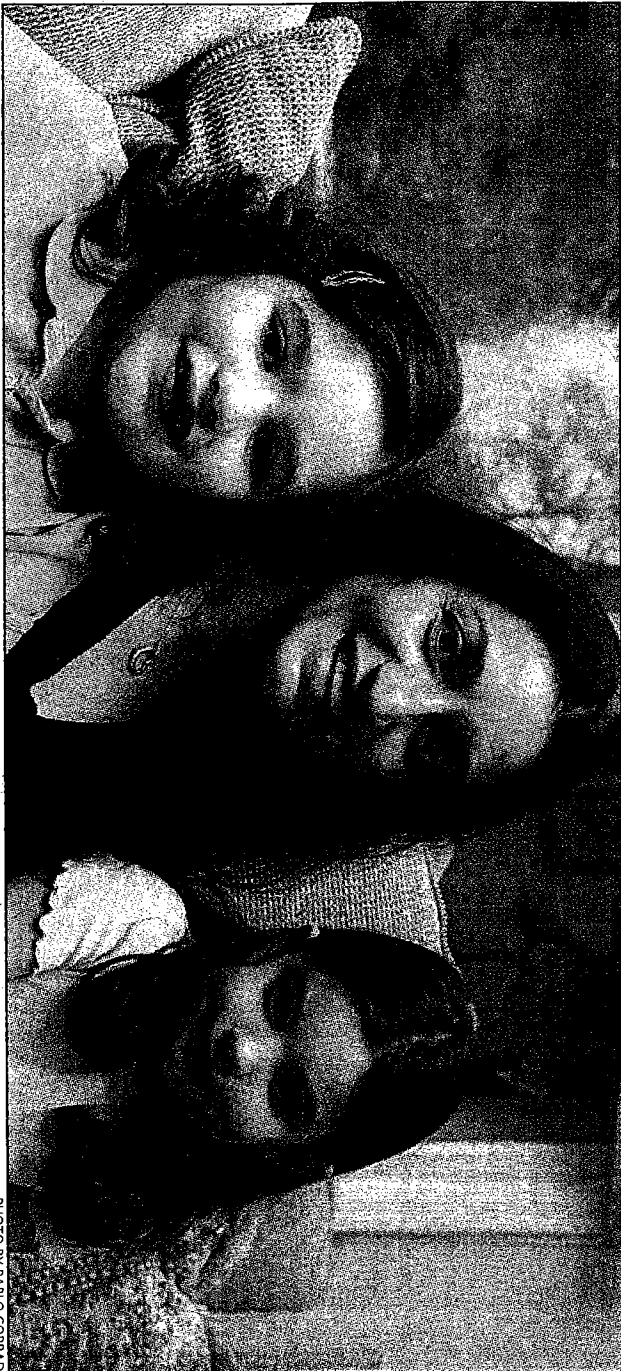
For Carolyn Rochel, this weekend's Long Island Marathon is not so much a race as it is a celebration.

Rochel, who is running Saturday's 5-kilometer portion of the race, has the best of all reasons to celebrate. Last week, doctors removed the mediport from her 6-year-old daughter Kaitlyn's chest, marking the end to Kaitlyn's 2½-year treatment for acute lymphoblastic leukemia.

"I'm really not a runner, but I wanted to do something special to mark this," said Rochel of Wantagh. "I also wanted to give back to an organization that really helped us get through this."

Rochel is one of close to 100 runners at this weekend's Festival of Races who will be competing to raise money for Friends of Karen, a charity dedicated to providing emotional, financial and advocacy support to children with life-threatening illnesses and their families. The charity, which has an office in Port Jefferson, helps families in 22 counties in the tri-state area.

It is runners like Rochel who are the true story of the Long Island Marathon, which is actually a festival of races that take place Saturday and Sunday. This is not the New York Marathon, a world-class race used by professional runners to make a name. Rather, this is a race for everyone —



Carolyn Rochel will run 5-kilometer in support of daughter Kaitlyn, 6, who finished cancer treatment. Right is Lauren, 4.

PHOTO BY PABLO CORRADI

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there is the 5k, one-mile and a kids event Saturday, followed by a marathon, half-marathon and 10k Sunday. Some 7,000 runners are expected to participate in the weekend races; many of them like Rochel are championing a cause.

Rochel's journey to the Long Island Marathon began in November 2006 when Kaitlyn, then 3, spiked a high fever:

Her pediatrician sent her to the emergency room at Long Island Jewish Medical Center, where doctors gave them the diagnosis that turned their world upside down.

"We went to the emergency room, and didn't leave the hospital for 28 days," Rochel said.

Rochel quit her job as a speech therapist. Her younger daughter, Lauren, who was 1

at the time, moved in with Rochel's mother. And Rochel and her husband, Jim, basically moved into the hospital.

A social worker at the hospital introduced the family to Friends of Karen social worker Maria Krellenstein. Krellenstein was to be instrumental in getting the family through the next 2½ years.

"Whenever I was at my lowest point, it seemed like she would call," Rochel said.

"There's just so much that a family goes through when something like this happens. We were fortunate to be in a good financial position, but

Friends of Karen did so much to help our family. There were Christmas packages, birthday packages. They were just there for us."

Today, Kaitlyn is an active and thoughtful kindergartner who loves Disney princesses and American Girl dolls. She is so active that she won't even be race-side Saturday to cheer on her mother.

Said Rochel: "She has a dance class. She's missed so much over the last two years that I want to let her be a kid and do her own activities. . . . The race is my way of celebrating that she can do that."