

Bryant Graeber, face of Harris Y, greets millionth guest

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He's been the friendly face greeting members at the door of the Harris YMCA for more than a decade. And on Friday, Bryant Graeber welcomed his one millionth guest.

Graeber, 29, began manning the doors with a smile immediately after graduating from Myers Park High in 2003. His family said the job is a natural fit for his optimism and genuine love of people.

Born with the rare genetic disease called MPS1, Graeber has inspired and encouraged members through his greetings four days a week for years, said Rick Dunlap, financial development director at the Harris Y.

Friday morning – which was proclaimed “Bryant Graeber Day” by Charlotte Mayor Patrick Cannon – Graeber made his millionth greeting to Bill Spiers.

“Bryant has a true servant’s heart and just loves interacting with people,” Dunlap said. “His job at the YMCA allows him to do that every day he’s here.”

In kindergarten, Bryant had an eye exam that showed corneal clouding, father Blake Graeber said, which led to the diagnosis of MPS1. The enzyme deficiency causes dysfunction in every organ because the missing enzyme is needed to break down the build up of sugar in the body, Blake Graeber said.

When Bryant was 14, he was one of 10 teens who participated in an experimental enzyme replacement therapy program at UCLA. The synthetic drug therapy was approved by the FDA about four years later, Graeber said, and is now dispensed to young children around the

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world.

While it's not a cure, the enzyme therapy Bryant Graeber will continue to receive weekly the rest of his life slows the progression of the disease, allowing for a higher quality of life and longer life, his father said.

"We were told typically a (MPS1) child wouldn't survive much beyond their teenage years. And here we have Bryant, who'll be 30 (in April)," Blake Graeber said. "He's a hero for a lot of reasons."

The entryway of the Harris Y and a plaque with his likeness were dedicated to Graeber in 2005, Dunlap said, and members and staff are thankful for each day that he continues to live independently, is able to take a special CATS bus to work and can make others smile.

"He's really remarkable," Dunlap said. "Bryant is the true face of the Harris YMCA."

Bryant Graeber said the best part of his job "is helping people feel good when they walk in and when they walk out. Because that's something that was (taught) by my mom and dad. They always told me treat people how I'd like to be treated."

