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A groundbreaking of the Zach Tompkins Memorial Stadium on Friday brought one family's dream a step closer to reality.

By JULIE HANSON

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HUDSON — A groundbreaking of the Zach Tompkins Memorial Stadium on Friday brought one family's dream a step closer to reality.

"It's a tribute to a young man that had a dream cut short due to tragedy," said Congressman Charles Bass.

It's also a story of a family that put their grief aside and brought the community together to reach an important goal, he said.

Bass was joined by state and local officials at the ceremony.

State Senator Sharon Carson said the groundbreaking was a pivotal event for the community.

"It's just really at times overwhelming to take a tragic situation and turn it into a positive for your community," Carson said.

Zach Tompkins was 11 in March 2010 when he died in his sleep from an undetected genetic heart disorder called Long QT Syndrome. Zach loved football. After practice he and his father often purchased a scratch ticket, hoping to use the lottery winnings to build a stadium for his beloved Hudson-Litchfield Bears, said his mother Necole Tompkins. She decided to build the stadium shortly after Zach died. Zach could turn any negative into a positive and would have been saddened if she hadn't tried, she said.

The community rallied around her cause. The town donated 13 acres for the field and the Zachary M. Tompkins Memorial fund raised over \$300,000. In total the project is expected to cost about \$1 million.

Throughout the process Tompkins was driven by a desire to see children play the game Zach loved on his field.

She offered brief remarks before the groundbreaking.

"The most important thing is Zach is not forgotten and he continues on through us," Tompkins said.

He would be pleased that the field will help other children and with the effort everyone showed on his behalf, she said.

"Even though I thank every one of you, he's really pulling a lot of strings up that and helping us out," Tompkins said.

His father Michael thanked attendees for helping the family through a difficult time.

"It's a very hard day for my family," he said. "It makes it a little bit easier when I look around and everyone who helped us is here.

Coach Tm Cronin was happy to lend the family a hand.

"Talk about a strong family," Cronin said. "They don't come any tougher than that."

Cronin coached Zach's younger brother Nick. Zach's father is also a coach with the league. Cronin said he admires the strength it took for Nick to step back on the field.

"He had more toughness and courage that any member of the team," Cronin said.

After the ceremony boys tossed a football around in the mud that hopefully will be transformed into a playing field by the end of next season.

Nikolas Hellwig played on Zach's team and said he would have been pleased with the results.

"It's really exciting that our whole community is coming together to build this," Hellwig said A small group milled around stadium plans and envisioned the finished project. Gene Briand often comes to watch his grandson play with the Bears and has donated to the project. Seeing the project move forward touched his emotions.

"My heart hasn't got enough words to express what I feel," Briand said.

A \$500,000 grant awarded to the project at the groundbreaking will be added to \$150,000 already received to complete asbestos removal on the site. The EPA and the New Hampshire DES have approved plans to clean the site.

The completed project includes two fields, a walking trail and a winter ice rink.

For more information visit www.zacharytompkins.org.