Movember hits home for Loyola freshman

By Erin Vogel
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Loyola University freshman Owen McAndrews admits his Movember mustache is "creepy" and "uncomfortable." He also says it also has taken a toll on his social life, turning off females and eliciting looks of disgust.

But it's worth it to him.

McAndrews has cancer--although it's in remission--and the Movember campaign to raise awareness for men's health issues hits home for the 19-year-old business major and member of the Loyola Ramblers volleyball team.

At the urging of two of his Ramblers captains, McAndrews put together a Movember team with his teammates and worked with the athletic department to raise money for the campaign that features men growing mustaches during November. As of early Friday--the last official day of the drive--the 76-member team had raised $7,861, ranking them No. 209 out of the 14,753 Movember teams tracked at us.movember.com.

"I'll definitely be doing Movember in the future," said McAndrews, who is growing significant facial hair for the first time. "Even after I graduate, I'll definitely continue to do it, and I'm going to continue to raise awareness about men's health."

Adding to the good news, McAndrews was told during a doctor's visit over Thanksgiving break that the testicular cancer he was diagnosed with as a junior in high school is still in remission. He has been cancer-free for a year and half now.

Movember's use of facial hair as "walking billboards" is similar to how McAndrews has dealt with his illness. Shortly after his diagnosis, he said he organized an assembly at his small Ohio high school to let everyone know what he was going through and told his classmates if anyone had similar concerns, they should ask him about them.

"The first thing I wanted to do was tell people," McAndrews said. "I just wanted to get it all out in the open. That was another thing that really helped me through it--because I did that, I got so much more support."

"That would be my biggest advice to anybody who is struggling with something like this or has a question. Talk to anybody who will listen, and you'll get a lot of support."

McAndrews said he appreciates the comedy behind Movember because it has helped him deal with the reality of being diagnosed with cancer at such a young age.
"[Movember] adds a sense of humor to something people really never talk about," he said. "The mustache gets a lot of looks of disgust until I tell them why I'm doing it and how much money we've raised, and that disgust turns to appreciation and astonishment."

Despite the enormous success of his team's drive and his enthusiasm for the cause, McAndrews said he is looking forward to shaving off the mustache.

"A lot of the girls I was talking to in October don't really talk to me anymore," he said. "They said they'll continue to talk to me when this mustache is off my face. They were supportive of the cause, but they just said the mustache looks ridiculous on me."

McAndrews has been playing volleyball since sixth grade and missing two months of the sport after he had two surgeries following his diagnosis only strengthened his passion for it. 'Don't give up, don't let this beat you, you're going to beat this, and you're going to be OK in the end,' " he said. "[Playing volleyball] really helped me out."

Friday might be the last official day of the mustache drive, but donations will still be accepted through the first week of December on the Movember website. You can find the team page for Loyola Athletics at http://us.movember.com/team/650653.