

After diagnosis, Lowell teen designs Pats hat for children's hospital



Greater Lowell Tech senior Carolyn Noel, 18, of Lowell, puts on the Patriots hat she designed while being treated for a Von Hippel Lindau Disease brain tumor at Children's Hospital, with help from her mother Patti Noel, right. (SUN/Julia Malakie)

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LOWELL — Before even setting foot through the door of the Noel family's home, it's not hard to tell they're Patriots fans.

There's a Pats banner hanging in one of the front windows, and a license plate holder on the car in the driveway. Inside the house is no different, from the football helmet string lights on the mantle to the Patriots blankets on the couch and the memorabilia posters lining the walls.

But unlike most fans, Carolyn Noel, 18, has had a few unique opportunities when it comes to the Patriots. A few weeks ago at a home game against the Cleveland Browns, Carolyn got the chance to present a [Patriots hat she designed](#) to the team's owner, Robert Kraft.

It was made possible through Boston Children's Hospital, where Carolyn stayed for about a month last spring. She'd been diagnosed with Von Hippel-Lindau disease, a rare genetic condition that causes tumors and cysts to grow in the body, and underwent surgery to remove tumors on her brain.



Carolyn Noel, far right, stands on the field at Gillette Stadium with her parents, Patti and Raymond Noel, at an October game against the Cleveland Browns. Before the game, Carolyn presented the Patriots hat she designed to owner Robert Kraft.

Between that and a subsequent stay at Spaulding Rehabilitation Hospital, she missed most of the tail end of her junior year at Greater Lowell Technical High School in Tyngsboro, where she's part of the early childhood education program. Carolyn is one of the only students on the early childhood education track who is also a member of the school's transitional occupational program (TOPS), which falls under the special education department and provides functional academic courses and specialized vocational training.

"It was tough," said Carolyn's mom, Patti Noel. "... It's lifelong and she'll be monitored for the rest of her life, but it wasn't cancerous. She's just a strong girl that's going to be going through this."

Carolyn's family covered her room at the Children's Hospital with posters of Rob "Gronk" Gronkowski, her favorite former player, and was even hoping to attract a visit

from the retired tight end. When word got around that she was a huge Patriots fan, the hospital reached out to ask if she'd like to help design this year's team hat benefiting the Boston Children's Foundation.

With help from clothing company New Era, Carolyn designed the red, white and blue striped hat alongside Patriots center David Andrews, who's on injured reserve this season.

"It was so awesome to get to spend the day with Carolyn designing this year's Patriots Foundation hat. Watching her design and create the perfect hat was so much fun, and she obviously did a great job making a hat that we will be proud to wear," Andrews said in a statement provided by a Patriots media representative. "Carolyn is very strong and courageous and really was an inspiration to me. Now she can know that she's having her own impact by helping others through this hat."

Carolyn also got the opportunity to attend the Patriots Foundation's Premiere Kickoff Gala, where the guest list closely matched the team roster.

"It's bittersweet, because as much of fans we are, I'd rather not have any of this because of how we got there," Patti Noel said. "But she's my hero."

Though Carolyn never did get a visit from Gronk, her mother, who works for Delta Airlines, happened to run into him in the Delta SkyLounge at Logan Airport. He was kind enough to make a video for Carolyn, encouraging her to "stay strong."

Carolyn said her friends at school thought the video was "really cool." Her mom agrees.

"Her baptism, it was during a Patriots playoff game and some of her uncles and stuff were on the phone during the baptism watching the game," Patti Noel said, laughing. "So, yeah — the poor kid didn't have a choice but to become a Pats fan."

The hat Carolyn designed is available for \$29.99 on the [Patriots ProShop website](#). Five dollars from each sale goes to the Boston Children's Hospital.