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Hair today -- gone Monday

Cab Calloway student to lose his long locks to lend a hand to charity

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When Tony Marconi first saw Andrew Zaldivar, he saw a younger version of himself.

"I see this kid with the long hair, walking around," Marconi said, "and my hair was as long as that when I grew up. When I see that, I smile every time."

To those who know him, Zaldivar is about much more than his mane, though even that hair is more than superficial.

The accomplished high school student-athlete known for his spirit and dedication to others will shed his hair in front of his classmates on Monday. Money raised from the event will benefit several charities and his hair will be made into wigs for people battling illness.

Zaldivar, 18, didn't get tired of his hairstyle. Instead, his future as an Air Force Academy cadet requires that the locks must go. He reports for basic training in Colorado on June 24.

Zaldivar is a student at Cab Calloway School of the Arts, which shares the old Wilmington High building with Charter School of Wilmington. Because Cab Calloway does not have interscholastic sports programs, its students are allowed to play on Charter teams.

Scholastically, because of honors classes, Zaldivar carries a 4.5 grade-point average on a 4.0 scale. Last school year, he was named the state's Outstanding Male Hispanic Student by the Hispanic Student Recognition Program.

Along with lacrosse, which Marconi coaches, Zaldivar has played football and wrestled for Charter.

In the past six years, Zaldivar has had one haircut. As a ninth-grader, he received "just a trim" of a few inches off his flowing locks.

On Monday, Cab Calloway will hold a "Cut Z's Tail" assembly at 2:30 p.m in the school gymnasium. The cut hair will go to Locks of Love, which uses donations to make hairpieces for those suffering from medical hair loss.

For two more days, Zaldivar's hair will be 27 inches long, well past the shoulders on his 5-foot-11, 205-pound frame.

"I wasn't one of those kids who would be afraid to go to the barber," Zaldivar said. "In sixth grade, that's a time when you see the older kids, and you want to be like them. So, I wanted to grow out my hair, and I really didn't get my hair cut."

For more than a month, the school has been selling raffle tickets. Winners will either cut a small part of Zaldivar's locks or snip off one of four long ponytails that he will tie his hair into.

The money raised Monday will benefit several groups, including the Cab Calloway and Charter schools.

Most of the proceeds will be split between two other groups, one being DFRC, sponsor of the annual Blue-Gold All-Star Football Game that benefits Delawareans with intellectual disabilities. Zaldivar was an All-State linebacker for the Charter football team in the fall and has been selected for this year's game on June 19.

The other will be the Kelly Heinz- Grundner Brain Cancer Foundation in memory of two sisters who died of brain cancer 19 weeks apart. Cynthia (Cannatelli) Herrick died in November and Nicole (Cannatelli) Testa on Easter Sunday this year. They were in their late 30s.

The Zaldivars are close with the Testa family, and Cab Calloway freshman Kenny Testa, Nicole's son, is staking claim to be the one who wields the electric clippers to give Zaldivar his final buzz.

'A very mature young man'

Zaldivar is the second of three children for Manuel Zaldivar and his wife, Julie, who have since divorced. The others are Matthew, 17, and Chelsea, 22. Andrew Zaldivar was born in South Bend, Ind., and because of his father's job, the family moved six times in seven years through 1998, when they came to Delaware.

Manuel Zaldivar works as a project controls engineer for KBR in Newark. The family lives in Hockessin. When his job recently required him to be in Massachusetts most of the workweek, Andrew and Matthew Zaldivar ate dinner at the Testa house.

"I thought, 'This guy is crazy,' " Testa said of the first time he saw Zaldivar, "but some people have different styles. He likes that style and I like it, too. It's a laid-back style. But I want to cut it off."

Testa and Matthew Zaldivar, who each have their hair clipped short, were on the Charter wrestling team this season with Andrew. High school wrestlers have to watch their weight all season so they can remain qualified to compete at their weight class. Testa, 15, placed fourth at the state championships at the lightest weight class, 103 pounds. He said Andrew Zaldivar, who did not have to stick to a diet as strictly as Testa, would always show off the bigger dinner he was allowed to eat.

Ken Testa Sr., Nicole's widower, said that when the Zaldivar brothers came over to eat dinner with his son and daughter, he was reminded of the big family dinners he used to have with his five siblings.

"[Andrew and Matthew Zaldivar] treated Kenny like a little brother. Both of them are just good, genuine kids. ... and what Andrew is doing just tells you about his personality. He wants to do what he can not just for himself but for others. A very mature young man."

The hair has gotta go

"Like a son."

"A free spirit."

These are the phrases many people use to describe Andrew Zaldivar.

He enjoys eating Hungarian goulash and cheesesteaks from his father's old neighborhood in Philadelphia. He played the saxophone in the school band before varsity sports required most of his time. He recently learned how to ride a motorcycle.

"A perfect example of the type of kid you would want," said Kim Rigby, a guidance counselor at Cab Calloway whose husband, Reese, is the Charter varsity wrestling coach. "His hair means so much to him, but he's always thinking of ways to help out someone else."

Zaldivar started working his way onto Charter varsity sports teams in the eighth grade, which is permitted when grade schools and high schools fall under the same administration.

Former Charter football coach Steve Dent didn't hesitate to play Zaldivar at starting nose guard as an eighth-grader.

"He's a bit of a free spirit," said Dent, "and with the Cab kids, you always get a really creative kid ... [and] he's the type of kid who just really enjoyed playing, regardless of the outcome or anything like that. He was always fighting every single play. A joy to coach."

When Zaldivar decided on the Air Force, after considering Princeton, Cornell and other schools, he could no longer avoid a certain chair.

"If I was going to go the military route," Zaldivar said, "the first words out of everybody's mouth were, 'You know you are going to have to get that hair cut.' "

So be it.

"He stands out as being different, simply because of his long hair," said Mary Caputo, an adviser at Cab Calloway, "but the younger students look up to him."

One of those younger students is his brother Matthew.

"A bunch of my friends are always asking when Andrew's leaving," the younger Zaldivar said. "They also ask if I'm looking forward to summer. I always tell them that I'm not.

"The sooner summer comes, the sooner Andrew leaves, which I'm not too excited about, because he's my best friend."
