

## **Child's memory motivates firefighters to raise money for their buddy, Beau**

By Kim Grizzard

Published September 14, 2008

Every time Mary Miller sees a fireman she says, "There goes Beau's buddy."

Firefighters became friends of Miller's grandson, Beau Stanley, last year during his long stay at Pitt County Memorial Hospital, where he was being treated for cancer. Beau loved it when firefighters came to see the children on his floor. He loved Sparky, the fire dog. He loved his fireman's hat.

Firefighters loved Beau, too. They climbed a ladder to wave at him through the window of his hospital room. They were pallbearers at his funeral.

They drove a firetruck in his funeral procession. Hung across the back was a banner that paid tribute to 2-year-old Beau.

Greenville firefighter Jake Valevich continues to carry the banner today through **Beau's Buddies** Cancer Fund. The charity, which has adopted the motto "Friends Helping Friends," will have a its first fundraiser this week, a dinner and auction followed by a golf tournament.

Valevich is not a golfer. But his link to the bald, blue-eyed toddler who has become the charity's namesake has driven him to become involved in the effort to help families of cancer patients.

A year ago, Valevich had never met Beau. But Valevich's wife, Kristin, had told him stories about a friend's nephew who often wore a fireman's hat around the Children's Hospital, where he had spent much of his life since being diagnosed with neuroblastoma at age 17 months.

Miller is not exactly sure how her grandson became so drawn to the siren of the fire engine. But she believes it started with the hat.

A child life specialist brought one to Beau one day to try to console him and distract him from the next procedure.

"They'll go in with a toy to try to help," Miller said. "They brought a fireman's hat in there one day, and he liked it.

"Then a couple of times the fire alarm went off, and he thought the firemen had turned it off," she said, "and he wanted the firemen to come and turn it back on."

When Beau was able to come home, his family arranged for him to visit the city's fire station headquarters. After a tour, Valevich put Beau's car seat in the truck. With parents Jennifer and Parham Stanley in the back, Beau got to go for a ride.

"As soon as they told him we were giving him a ride in the fire truck, his face just lit up and he was all excited," Valevich said. "He had a great time."

Valevich, known to Beau as "Fireman Jake," let him play with the lights, even run the siren.

"Jake being Jake and Beau being Beau, it just clicked," Miller said. "It was like a special bond after that."

Beau wanted to have his new buddy come and visit him, which Valevich and several firefighters did after Beau was readmitted to the hospital.

A little more than six weeks after he met Beau, Valevich got the call he had dreaded. Beau's condition had worsened, and there wasn't much time.

A little more than six weeks later, Valevich got the call he had dreaded. Beau's condition had worsened, and there wasn't much time.

"We took a fire truck out there and raised a ladder up to his window," Valevich said, recalling how the toddler saw him standing at the window in his gear and waved. "It was just heartbreaking."

Three days later, Valevich and his fellow firefighters put on their dress uniforms to pay their respects to Beau.

"We gave him a fireman's funeral," Valevich said. "It was the hardest thing I think I've ever had to do."

The bond between fireman and family continued after the funeral. When Dr. John Gibbs, a Greenville neurologist and cancer survivor, began efforts to organize a charity event in Beau's honor, the Stanleys invited Valevich to participate. He not only signed on to attend the dinner and auction, he began recruiting friends and businesses to help sponsor the event.

"I've become a real big cheerleader," said Valevich, whose sister is a brain cancer survivor.

"They (the Stanleys) have actually inspired me to do other things ... as far as fundraising and cancer research."

This past weekend, Valevich was one of the participants in Buzz the Red White and Blue, a fundraiser for The Dream Factory of North Carolina. Next summer, he hopes to spend some time volunteering with Code 3 for a Cure, a group of firefighters traveling the country to raise awareness of cancer and to encourage donations for groups battling the disease.

Jennifer Stanley met with members of Code 3 for a Cure when the group made a stop in Winston-Salem in June. She shared Beau's story and gave the firefighters a framed picture of her son, which they placed in an honorary seat in Beau's memory for the remainder of the cross-country tour.

"Throughout our journey, we have been feeling as though an angel has been watching over us," a Code 3 member wrote on the group's Web site. "Almost miraculously, we have missed every bad weather spot there has been as we have crossed the nation, and we truly feel in our hearts that Beau has had something to do with that."

For Miller, memories of Beau are always close. As the **Beau's Buddies** tournament nears, she sees his smiling face on banners around town. She's reminded of the way the toddler loved to hit golf balls and ride in the cart.

But almost nothing brings back memories like the sound of a fire alarm. Whenever she hears one, Miller believes it is a sign that Beau is not far away.

"As we look back, we see God had a purpose for him," she said. "He's just been such an inspiration.

"He's continuing to live on through various ways. ... He'll be remembered for the special boy that he was."

Today is the registration deadline for **Beau's Buddies** Cancer Fund's first fundraiser. The dinner auction will be held Sept. 21 at the Hilton Greenville, followed by a golf tournament Sept. 22 at the Greenville Country Club. For more information, visit [beausbuddies.com](http://beausbuddies.com) or call 321-7290.

(c) 2008 Cox Newspapers, Inc. - The Daily Reflector