

Nearly 500 attend event to join fight against cancer

By Kim Grizzard

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Of those gathered for the first **Beau's Buddies** fundraiser, not all were friends of Beau Stanley, the blue-eyed toddler who became the charity's namesake after his death from cancer last year. And some do not know John Gibbs, a Greenville neurologist and cancer survivor whose vision to help patients and their families was a driving force behind the charity.

But they have a common enemy: cancer.

A handful of cancer survivors were among nearly 500 people attending the cancer fund's first dinner and auction, held Sunday at the Hilton Greenville. But when those who had family or friends affected by the disease were asked to stand, the numbers grew exponentially.

"There can't be very many people left sitting in this room," said Melissa Spain, executive director of the Greater Greenville Community Foundation. Spain was attending the event to announce a \$5,000 donation from the foundation to the cancer fund, which has adopted the motto "Friends Helping Friends."

Among those lending a hand were Muriel Webb, whose 10-year-old grandson, Jonathan Moebs, is being treated for leukemia. The Moebs family came out for Sunday's event, including Jonathan's parents, John and Kathy, and his sister, Jessica, 23, who battled cancer seven years ago.

"Jessica is cancer free now," Webb said. "That's a praise to God.

"We wanted to give back to the community," she said. "The community really came out for Jonathan."

Frankie and Janna Pugh feel the same way. They became supporters of **Beau's Buddies** after their son, Davis, was declared cured last month.

"I feel like I'm just so thankful and so blessed that the least I can try to do is give hope and encouragement to other families that miracles do happen," Janna Pugh said. "My (reason for) wanting to get involved is to provide some hope and some help to families that are battling the same illness."

When Davis, now 8, was diagnosed with cancer in 2002, the family would spend much of the next year at Pitt County Memorial Hospital, where Davis received chemotherapy. They also spent more than two months at Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston.

It was there that the Pughs came to understand the plight of those who must deal with cancer far from home and away from friends and family.

"When you're a family that has to travel for treatment, it's items you don't have budgeted," she said. "Your world's turned upside down with all these unexpected expenses that you haven't planned for."

Beau's Buddies hopes to provide support for families of patients, helping out with everything from phone cards for long-distance calls to assistance with rent or utilities. Organizers also hope the charity can help create a more home-like environment in hospitals for children and adults who must spend so much time there.

In the year they spent in and out of the hospital with their son, Beau, Parham and Jennifer Stanley couldn't help but feel for families who were facing the same disease that they were, but seemed to be fighting it alone.

"Ninety-five percent of the people that we came in contact with in the hospitals had nothing," Parham Stanley told supporters on Sunday.

Those were the people the Stanleys were thinking of when they agreed that the cancer fund Gibbs had envisioned could carry their son's name. And it was for other families who are still fighting the disease that the Stanleys agreed to serve on the board for **Beau's Buddies**.

"Once you go down this path, you never leave this path, even when this tragedy is over." Parham Stanley said.

"God gave us Beau for a certain reason for two years; now we'll give you **Beau's Buddies** forever."

Though Gibbs is now in remission and was able to return to his practice last November, he also knows his life will never be the same.

"When I thought about helping people, I began to consider those individuals who were up there fighting with me on that (cancer) floor," he said. "I began to gain inspiration from some of these people."

One of those who inspired him was Beau Stanley, the 2-year-old cancer patient he never met. Beau died last November shortly after Gibbs returned to his practice.

"He represents Greenville to me," Gibbs said. "He would have lived here. He would have done things here. He is doing some things here. I think all of us in our organization can truly say his potential was not lost, nor will it be lost ever. As I look around this room, I see his work."

The **Beau's Buddies** Golf Tournament is being held today at Greenville Country Club. For more information about the charity, visit beausbuddies.com.

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