

Beau's Buddies gather to fight cancer

By Michael Abramowitz

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Hundreds of Greenville residents who share a common bond joined together at the Hilton Greenville on Sunday night to celebrate the second **Beau's Buddies** Cancer Fund dinner and auction.

The event included a social and dinner, followed with entertainment by rising country singing star Heidi Newfield.

Considered the highlight of the evening was the live auction of gifts, jewelry, trips and specialty services donated by local contributors and sponsoring corporations.

The proceeds, along with donations raised throughout the year, will be used to provide a wide range of services and support for families who face the challenges of cancer and to advance cancer research in eastern North Carolina medical centers, board members said.

So far this year, **Beau's Buddies'** contributions have been used to purchase gas cards and Wal-Mart cards for adult and pediatric cancer patients with a financial need; three chemotherapy chairs and a set of special scales for East Carolina University's Leo W. Jenkins Cancer Center; DVD players and video discs for PCMH Children's Hospital patients; a golf cart for the ECU Oncology clinic to transport kids who are unable to walk due to chemotherapy treatments; donations to the Children's Miracle Network; and many other individual patient needs and care items, according to board member.

The organization draws its inspiration from the personal experiences of its members, all of whom have been touched either directly or indirectly, through a loved one or family member, by cancer, Dr. John Gibbs, a founding member of the board of directors, said.

Gibbs just completed a second battle with a rare form of cancer, mediastinal stage-II liposarcoma, after being originally diagnosed in 2006.

During his many hospitalizations and treatments, Gibbs personally learned the anguish that cancer patients and their families feel.

"I treated thousands of patients before, but now, when I look at the disease process after being a patient myself, I see that there is a medical aspect of treatment and a psychological and emotional aspect to treatment," Gibbs said, pointing to his heart. "I've started to learn that the heart is as important as the medicine, particularly with a disease like cancer."

Gibbs related his own desire to give up after contracting the disease twice.

"In many ways, a patient's outlook affects his or her outcome, from direct results of treatments to whether they even want to continue with it," he said.

When the members of **Beau's Buddies** show that they care about the patient's comfort, surroundings and families, with their services, resources and time, it can have a big effect, Gibbs said.

"I spent 50 days in the hospital over the last two years, with four surgeries, 31 radiation treatments and 11 rounds of chemotherapy," Gibbs said. "I know for a fact that if a patient's surroundings appear bleak, his future can seem bleak as well."

Ben Parrott, a pharmaceutical sales representative and friend of Gibbs, also is a founding board member. He said the original idea was simply to host a small golf tournament.

Several people they spoke with suggested they expand the idea to include a dinner and auction. That idea grew further when they met Parham and Jennifer Stanley, Beau's parents.

Although Beau eventually lost his battle with cancer, the Stanleys stuck with the idea and with Parrott, Gibbs and others' help, the idea continued to grow, Parrott said.

"It's grown so much, with so many volunteers, a Web site, and more donations than we imagined, all of which we keep in eastern North Carolina," Parrott said. "The charitable heart of Greenville and its people has just been unbelievable."

Bryan Cooper, Gibbs' friend and the physician who diagnosed his cancer, recognized that this part of the state needed to begin to improve its cancer research and treatment capabilities to reach the same level that the East Carolina Heart Institute has delivered to Greenville, he said

"We need a pediatric bone marrow unit, a dedicated children's hospital cancer center, and other additions to our services," Cooper said.

The physician said that despite the year's economic recession and its impact on this area, he feels very positive about the continued growth of **Beau's Buddies'** fundraising efforts.

"The support of the people who live here is incredible. We have a dedicated group and we expect to continue growing," Cooper said.

Board members Blair and John VanCoutren said they were in awe of the people of Greenville for the support they've shown for **Beau's Buddies** during the economic downturn.

"It shows that everyone here still knows what's important," Blair VanCoutren said. "With the drive and energy that these people have, there's no telling what we will accomplish for many years to come."

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