

Beau's Buddies organizers see reasons for optimism

By Kim Grizzard

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Red Radio Flyers being pulled up and down the halls of Pitt County Memorial Hospital serve as a reminder that the world does not stop for cancer.

Some of the wagons were put there by Parham and Jennifer Stanley in memory of their 2-year-old son, Beau, who spent much of the last year of his life in the hospital. Others were gifts from **Beau's Buddies** Cancer Fund.

The local charity, which raised nearly \$150,000 in its first year, was created to help improve the lives of cancer patients and their families. Its second annual fundraiser, a dinner and auction, is planned for Oct. 25, followed by a Nov. 6 country music concert featuring Heidi Newfield.

"Last year was so emotional. There simply wasn't a dry eye in the place," said Debbie Hudson, a board member for **Beau's Buddies**. "I think this year, as much as you don't want to take away from the seriousness of the disease that cancer is, there is hope."

One reason for the attitude of expectancy is due to the Stanley family. Jennifer is pregnant with twin boys; Miller Parham and Mattox Lee are due early next year.

"People have said we were double blessed," Jennifer said. "There's some good that's come out of it."

Dr. John Gibbs, who conceived the idea for **Beau's Buddies** charity when he was being treated for cancer in 2007, has also added to his family. He was married in August in Duke Chapel in Durham, where he was undergoing treatment for a recurrence of his cancer.

After undergoing surgery, chemotherapy and radiation, Gibbs returned to work last week at East Carolina Neurology.

"I feel very blessed," he said. "I'm always keenly aware of the fact that I've had several friends pass away this year from cancer, some of them my age, some young children I've met. I feel like a lot of what I'm trying to do is in their memory."

Donations given in memory or in honor of cancer patients have paid for everything from chairs for a chemotherapy treatment area at the Leo Jenkins Cancer Center to fuel for families traveling long distances for cancer treatments. **Beau's Buddies** helped sponsor a toy drive for the Children's Hospital and Christmas and Valentine's Day parties for pediatric cancer patients and their families.

"We were able to give them one day when they felt like a normal child again," **Beau's Buddies** board member David Vaughn said. "That's special to us."

There have been individual gifts, such as a two-month supply of Pediasure for a pediatric cancer patient and a donation that enabled a terminally ill woman to take her family on one last vacation. Some of the funds went to Camp Dove, for adult cancer survivors, and some went to buy a golf cart for a camp for children with cancer. Some donations, such as portable DVD players and movies, were immediately put to use. Others, such as \$50,000 designated for a new Children's Hospital, will be years in the making.

"What we've tried to do is spread it around," Gibbs said. "There's just a lot of need out there."

"Hopefully at some point (donors) will be able to see some of the fruits of their labors," he said.

"It's been very heartwarming to me."

Gibbs, who wondered if he would survive his most recent bout with cancer, said his work with **Beau's Buddies**, along with his wife, Melissa, helped give him the will to live.

"I understand that cancer could come back again for me," he said. "In the meantime I'm going to try to do the best that I can. I think raising money for individuals that have walked the same path that I've walked, it's been therapeutic for me."

The Stanleys have a similar sentiment. For them, their work with **Beau's Buddies** has been a way to channel their grief into something constructive.

"It's like my child," Jennifer said. "I would feel like I was kind of neglecting him (Beau) if I didn't continue.

"People are going through the same things we are," she said. "I hope maybe our story might bring a little bit of the hope."

Hudson sees reasons for optimism in both stories - Gibbs' and the Stanleys. She believes cancer survivors and those who have lost loved ones will take comfort in how both families have faced the disease.

"There are two families that took two very tragic things that happened but yet they were able to help people. They've gone on and continued living themselves and had some very positive, wonderful things happen in their lives," she said.

"Life does go on. It's what you make of it."

The **Beau's Buddies** Cancer Fund Dinner and Auction will be held at 6 p.m. Oct. 25 at the Hilton Greenville, 207 S.W. Greenville Blvd. Tickets are \$50 each. A concert featuring country music artist Heidi Newfield, will be held Nov. 6 at the Hilton Greenville. This is a ticketed event. Call 321-7290 or e-mail beausbuddies@yahoo.com for ticket information.

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