

## Bone marrow transplant patient will return to renovated home

By Kim Grizzard

Published March 30, 2010

When **Beau's Buddies** Cancer Fund had its first fundraising dinner, there was a place at the table for Kally Nelson.

The then 21-year-old softball player was there in honor of her mother, Jane, and her brother, Daniel, who had both died from cancer.

She was there in support of her father's co-worker, Dr. John Gibbs, who had been diagnosed with cancer the previous year.

She was there in memory of Beau Stanley, the charity's namesake, a child she had met at Pitt County Memorial Hospital's pediatric oncology department, where Kally had fought her own battle against the disease.

Now, **Beau's Buddies** wants to be there for Kally. The charitable fund, established to help cancer patients and their families, is leading an effort to renovate the Nelsons' house in Bethel to make a place for Kally, who is scheduled to return home in June following a bone marrow transplant.

"This is definitely a special situation," Debbie Hudson, a member of the board for **Beau's Buddies**, said of the chance to help a family that has previously supported the organization. "We felt like this was a great opportunity for **Beau's Buddies** to give back."

**Beau's Buddies'** gift, a \$25,000 renovation project, will be one of the charity's largest projects to date. To meet the sterile standards that Kally's immune system requires, the Nelson home needed to have windows replaced, carpet removed, and have the heating and air-conditioning system sanitized.

When Jenny Nelson learned what upgrades her stepdaughter's doctors were recommending, she wondered if the family had the schedule or the savings to accommodate them.

The stay-at-home mom already was spending several nights a week away from her son, Wesley, 12, to be with Kally in Chapel Hill. She and her husband, Roger, sometimes passed each other on the road as he took time from working two jobs as a nurse practitioner to share in Kally's care.

"We jokingly said, 'We need to call ABC,'" Jenny said, "because we need an extreme home makeover."

"Extreme Makeover: Home Edition," a reality-TV show hosted by Ty Pennington, provides home renovations for families facing hardships, rallying community volunteers to pitch in to complete the work. While the Nelson family did not have a celebrity spokesman, they already had community support.

Longtime friends Don and Kathy Carson and neighbors Charlie and Linda Wall were working to involve friends and community members in preparing Kally's room for her homecoming.

It was not difficult to get people on board. Roger Nelson has been a deacon at Bethel Baptist Church; Jenny has been president of Bethel School's PTA.

"They are good people," Linda Wall said. "If it were me or you or somebody else that they could help in our community, they would be more than willing."

In the aftermath of Hurricane Floyd, Jenny, who had just married Roger and moved to Bethel, gave away furniture to families in need. She and Linda cooked and served meals in the Nelson home for neighbors and even strangers who were affected by the storm.

"That's how it is in Bethel," Jenny said. "Everybody should live in a small town."

Kally, a standout player in the Pitt County Girls Softball League and later for Pitt Community College, made friends far beyond Bethel. A class from her alma mater, North Pitt High School, is volunteering to remove the carpet from her home. Churches like Bethel Baptist, where Kally has worked with the youth group, are also signing up to help.

"People love her," Jenny said. "Once somebody said, 'Kally Nelson needs ...' that was all they had to do because they love her so much."

That love is no mystery to Jenny, who has been Kally's mother since Kally was an early adolescent.

"I have to say that if I ever had a hero, it would be her," Jenny said. "She has seen her mama die. She was in the room with us the night her brother died. She's amazing. She just keeps going."

Kally has shown that same resiliency since her transplant on Feb. 18, pushing herself to exercise, even though she has to wear a heavy mask anytime she leaves her sterile apartment. Without the renovations to the entire Nelson home, Kally would have risked compromising her immune system when she left her room to watch television with the family or come to the table.

Carson is grateful that **Beau's Buddies** is moving forward with plans to renovate the remainder of the home. All the Nelsons' furniture and personal items are scheduled to be moved out by Thursday, and the group hopes to have window and flooring installed and painting complete by mid-May, one month before Kally's scheduled return.

"Trying to get different contractors to do different things in that timely fashion would have been almost impossible, but we were going to try," Don Carson said. "It was just a blessing from the good Lord that (**Beau's Buddies**) stepped up to the plate."

Jenny said she is overwhelmed that people who stood by the family during Jane's and Dan's illnesses and when Kally was diagnosed with bone cancer are there for them again.

"It's really overwhelming," she said. "They've always offered (to help), but we'd say, 'No we don't need anything.' This time it's different. This time we can't say, 'No, we don't need anything' because we really did."

She is grateful for **Beau's Buddies**, which has provided cancer patients and their families with everything Christmas toys to camp tuition and dental work to Disney World.

"I don't think some people realize how phenomenal it is to have **Beau's Buddies**," Jenny said.

"They're actually helping her be able to live and be comfortable, to feel like she can come home."

How to help

To volunteer to help with renovations, contact Don Carson at 714-5232 or Linda Wall, after 4 p.m., at 714-7025.

Donations for the home renovation project can be made to **Beau's Buddies** Cancer Fund, David G. Vaughn Construction, c/o Debbie Hudson, 1025 Director Court, Suite E, Greenville NC 27858.

The Web site is [www.beausbuddies.com](http://www.beausbuddies.com)

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