



The Vannie E. Cook Jr.

CHILDREN'S CANCER AND HEMATOLOGY CLINIC



Vol. 1, No.1

Fall 2004

City of McAllen Helps Local Children With Cancer

The Vannie E. Cook Jr. Children's Cancer and Hematology Clinic is raising funds to build a new infusion area for patients to receive chemotherapy that will focus on providing the important emotional support these youngsters need during sessions that can take up to eight hours.

The new infusion area would allow several children to receive treatment at one time, eliminating the current problem of not having enough space and equipment to handle the patient volume.

"Right now, the children are being treated in two small rooms," said Laura Martinez Ilgun, the clinic's director of development and public relations. "We've outgrown that space. It's causing scheduling problems and we really need the ability to treat more patients."



McAllen Mayor Leo Montalvo, center, visits with Dr. Juan Carlos Bernini, medical director of the Vannie E. Cook Jr. Children's Cancer and Hematology Clinic, left, and Dr. C. Kenneth Landrum, chairman of the board of directors of the Vannie E. Cook Jr. Cancer Foundation.

Ilgun said the new unit will center around the family, making the six-to-eight-hour chemotherapy visits more comfortable for the young patients.

"We will have activities for the families to participate in during the chemotherapy session and the

continued on page 3

Family Finds Support At Vannie Cook Clinic After Cancer Diagnosis

Celebrating the birthday of 6-year-old twins is a hectic event, so when J.C. Rodriguez hurt his knee playing soccer on his birthday, his mother, Kathy Alegria, didn't worry too much.

"I figured it was just a bruise," she said.

But the pain didn't go away and a month later, he was walking with a limp. The second doctor he visited ordered an MRI. When he saw the results he recommended an appointment with Dr. Juan Carlos Bernini at the Vannie E. Cook Jr. Children's

Cancer and Hematology Clinic in McAllen.

"It was cancer. We were shocked. My children had never been sick. Little flus here and there, but that was it. It was a total shock for all of us," Kathy said.

The last three years have been tough ones for the Rodriguez family. J.C. had 18 months of chemotherapy, needed home schooling and broke his leg during the treatment process. His twin brother,



J.C., far right, and Jose Rodriguez celebrate their birthday with Dr. Rodrigo Erana and Dr. Juan Carlos Bernini.

Jose, older brother, Robert, and parents were faced with handling the challenge of his illness.

Now, J.C.'s treatment is over. He's back in school and making excellent

continued on page 6

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"As a family, the Vannie Cook Cancer Foundation and now the Clinic are both very dear to our hearts. We want to continue to support the work that they do, honor the founders and keep the legacy going."

—Kathy Collins

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"We give because we saw firsthand what a difference it makes when the kids can be taken care of locally so they don't have to travel to San Antonio or Houston for treatment. When kids are sick, they need to be with their families."

—Greg Bassett

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"Having gone through having cancer myself, it's very heart-breaking seeing a child having to go through this. We must provide these children a chance at life. They haven't had the opportunity, yet, to reach their full potential, to live a full life, one that is filled with happiness and joy, not illness. Many of these children will die if not provided the necessary treatment for their diseases right here in McAllen."

—Patty Fallek

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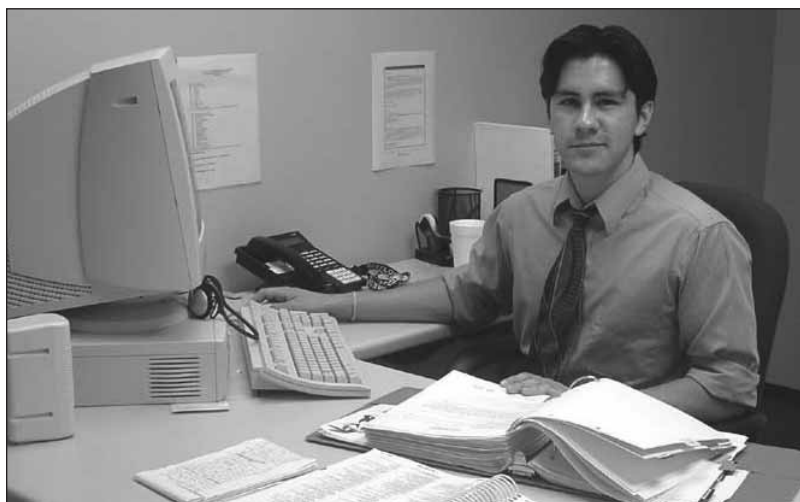
Clinic News



Dr. Peter G. Traber, president and CEO of Baylor College of Medicine, was a guest of Dr. C. Kenneth Landrum, chairman of the board of directors of the Vannie E. Cook Jr. Cancer Foundation, in a recent visit to the Valley. Shown during a tour of the clinic are Dr. Landrum, Dr. Traber and Laura Martinez Ilgun.



The Doctor's Hospital at Renaissance sponsored the opening reception for the Marking A Mark art exhibit at the International Museum of Art and Science. The exhibit is artwork by children touched by cancer and blood disorders. Pictured are Skip Courtney, CEO of Doctor's Hospital, with Laura Martinez Ilgun, director of development and public relations for the clinic.



Eli Munoz, a student in the University of Texas Pan American – Baylor College of Medicine's Premedical Honors Program, has been working as an intern at the Vannie E. Cook Jr. Children's Cancer and Hematology Clinic on the clinic's epidemiology study. The study seeks answers on the causes of cancer in the Rio Grande Valley. Eli was born and raised in Harlingen, and he will enter BCM in the fall of 2005.

Gifts to the Vannie Cook Clinic continued

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City of McAllen Helps Local Children With Cancer

(continued from page 1)

families will be able to visit with each other," she said. "It will provide a much more positive experience."

The price tag is steep, with clinic officials hoping to raise the needed \$500,000 within the next year.

The City of McAllen provided a much needed boost with a Community Development Block Grant of \$80,000. Several other fundraisers are planned and individuals and businesses are helping with the campaign.

"This new unit will really help our patients and their families," said Ilgun. "Emotional support is so important for these children and a family-centered infusion unit will provide a much higher level of support."

2004-2005 Vannie E. Cook Jr. Cancer Foundation Board of Directors



"Our patients have access to the best care and treatment available, thanks to the vision and support of the Vannie Cook Cancer Foundation and its board members."

— Dr. Juan Carlos Bernini, Clinic Medical Director

Seated l to r: Mrs. Margaret Wells, Mrs. Maxine Guerra, Mrs. Patty Fallek, Mrs. Marylou Trevino, Mrs. Frances McAllen, Mrs. Melissa Ontiveros, and Mrs. Julie Powers.

Standing l to r: Mr. Gary Gurwitz, Mr. Neal Runnels, Mr. Glenn Roney, Treasurer, Mr. Orvis Akers, Vice Chairman, Mr. S. Foss Jones, Mrs. Minnie Lanham, Secretary, Mr. A. C. Jaime, Dr. Juan Carlos Bernini, Dr. Rodrigo Eraña, Dr. C. Kenneth Landrum, Chairman and Ms. Laura Martinez Igun, Executive Director.

Not pictured: Mr. Ray Alexander, Ms. Chris Ardis, Mrs. Kathy Collins, Mr. John W. Kittleman, Mr. Bennie McDonald, Dr. Joseph McDonald, Mr. William Nix, Mrs. Marlee Payne, Mrs. Sandra Rodriguez, Mr. Dan Seitz, Jr., Mrs. Joan Tavarez, Mrs. Bennie Thompson, Mrs. Maria Teresa Garza, Mr. Keith Frase, not pictured: Mrs. Anna Bergh and Mrs. Maralessa Holand.

Junior League of McAllen Helps Clinic's Arts In Medicine Program

The Junior League of McAllen Inc. continues to be a generous supporter of projects to benefit the Vannie E. Cook Jr. Children's Cancer and Hematology Clinic.

Junior League members work with the children in the Arts In Medicine program at the clinic twice each week. In addition, this year's Provisional Class is collecting art supplies to be used in the clinic's arts program.

The arts program is a very important part of the treatment provided at the clinic. The clinic staff uses a family-centered approach to treatment and the arts program provides an outlet of expression for both the young patients and their families.

"It's a perfect match—the Junior League and the clinic. Both organizations are dedicated to helping local children live better lives. We look forward to seeing the AIM program grow with the support of the league and its members," said Mrs. Minnie Lanham, the board secretary of the Vannie Cook Foundation.



Junior League members help out at the Vannie E. Cook Jr. Children's Center and Hematology Clinic each week. Pictured above are Shannon Honrubia, Leanne Smith, AIM committee chair, Melissa Smith and Stephanie Bishop. Not pictured is Jill Pebley.

The program encourages self-expression, empowerment and the development of coping skills.

It's a multi-faceted program that includes arts and crafts, art education, music appreciation, guest artists, performing artists and storytelling.

The healing environment and treatment experience is enhanced when music is created, dance performed, plays produced, stories

told and spaces decorated with visual arts, by and for children.

In addition to the ongoing volunteer efforts of the Junior League members, the clinic's arts program was selected as a project of this year's provisional class.

The provisional class of the Junior League is made up of 16 women from

McAllen and its surrounding communities. The project is meant to give back to the community and help children with cancer and blood disorders and their families.

For more information on the Junior League or the arts supply drive, see the website at www.juniorleaguemcallen.org.

AFLAC Golf Tournament

The AFLAC-sponsored golf tournament benefiting the Vannie E. Cook Jr. Children's Cancer and Hematology Clinic raised almost \$50,000 for the clinic's new chemotherapy unit.

AFLAC, a leading provider of voluntary insurance coverage, held its inaugural golf tournament to benefit the clinic on Oct. 4.

The dramatic increase in patient numbers has put a severe strain on the clinic capacities and now we have a great need to add a new chemotherapy and infusion area that will allow us to treat significantly more children with cancer," said Dr. Juan Carlos Bernini, the clinic's medical director.

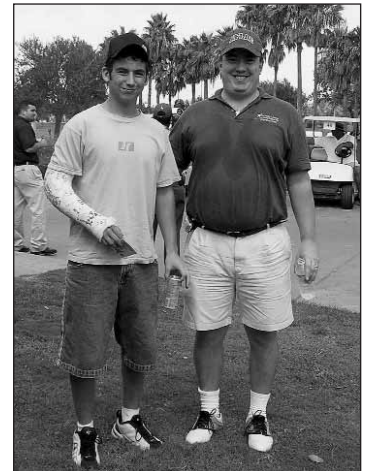
The state-of-the-art facility will be equipped with the latest medical technology and a new family-centered area will allow patients and families the opportunity to interact with each other.

A few lucky golfers at the tournament had the opportunity to "Golf with the Legends." Bob Lilly, Ed "Too Tall" Jones and Billy Joe Dupree, all former Dallas Cowboys stars, and William "Refrigerator" Perry, a former star of the Chicago Bears, were among those celebrities on the course for the tournament.

"Our team is an excellent and professional group of individuals who were excited and worked hard in securing sponsorships, teams and auction items from the community for this clinic to continue to grow and serve the needs of young patients," said Mario M. Davila, chairman of the AFLAC McAllen Regional Office Golf Tournament Committee.



The "Legends" visit the clinic. Seated: Laura Martinez Ilgun, Director of Development and Public Relations for the Clinic, Toni Davila with AFLAC and Dr. Ken Landrum, Board Chair, The Vannie E. Cook Jr. Cancer Foundation. Standing is Billy Keith, AFLAC, Bob Lilly, Anthony "Spud" Webb, Ed "Too Tall" Jones, Lou Zambrano, AFLAC, William "Refrigerator" Perry, Tony Hill, Mario Davila, Chairman, AFLAC McAllen Regional Office Golf Tournament Committee, Jose Guzman, Mario Davila Jr. and John Phillips, both of AFLAC.



Dr. Rodrigo Erana poses with patient Sal Vela, who was his caddy at the golf tournament.



Monica's Angels, a McAllen-based student organization, sold angel pins to raise funds for the new chemotherapy unit at the Vannie E. Cook Jr. Children's Cancer and Hematology Clinic. A total of 278 angels were sold, raising \$2,780. Shown are Julie Baker, Heather Baker, Brenda Espinoza, Sofi Vela, Lisa McCreery, Stephanie Ramirez, Jimmy Bassetti, Ricky Masso, Alex Orfanos, Nikki Baker, Ethny Nava, Raymond Jenkins, Preston Hendrichson, Chelsea Hook, Alfredo Montanaro, Arturo Ramos, Yusef Mohamed and Abner Gudino.



The AFLAC McAllen Regional office sponsored a golf tournament to benefit the clinic's new chemotherapy unit. Pictured from left, standing, are Myra Reyes, Marivel Mercado, John Phillips, Billy Keith, Mario M. Davila, Rebecca Mendez, Marissa Coker and Joaquin Davila. Seated, Toni Davila, Carol Keith and Stacy Madden. Not pictured is Lou Zambrano.

Kenedy Grant Helps Fund Chemotherapy Treatments

The Kenedy Memorial Foundation has recently awarded a generous \$20,000 donation to the Vannie E. Cook Jr. Children's Cancer and Hematology Clinic in McAllen to help underwrite the costs of chemotherapy treatments for local children suffering from cancer.

The Vannie E. Cook Jr. Cancer Foundation joined Baylor College of Medicine and Texas Children's Hospital in June 2001 to establish the first state-of-the-art clinic dedicated to providing comprehensive care to Rio Grande Valley children. The majority of the facility's cancer patients require chemotherapy, a life-saving treatment in many cases. The cost of chemotherapy is often the largest cost associated with pediatric cancer treatment, said Laura Martinez Ilgun, the clinic's director of development and public relations.

"So many of the families that we see here in the clinic have minimal resources, and have no federal funding available to them. Our mission is to treat all patients regardless of their ability to pay, so getting the support from the Kenedy Foundation helps insure that all of our local children

with cancer receive the care that they need and deserve," said Ilgun.

The Kenedy Memorial Foundation is organized exclusively for charitable purposes. Founded in 1961 by Sarita Kenedy East, granddaughter of Mifflin Kenedy and Petra Vela

Kenedy, the foundation has donated more than \$160 million to charitable causes and organizations in Texas. In South Texas, where the majority of its contributions have been made, the foundation is one of the major charity contributors.

Family Finds Support At Vannie Cook Clinic

continued from page 1

grades. Though the family has many challenges ahead, the treatment phase is behind them. And the family is grateful that J.C. could receive his treatment close to home in a caring environment.

"It was such a shock for all of us," Kathy said. We didn't know what to do about anything. The doctors and staff at the clinic helped us step by step. They are still so important to us. They took us in like family."

She said the fact that Jose was given attention along with his brother was very important.

"We were in the clinic on their birthday and they had a birthday cake for both J.C. and Jose. That touched me so much. It was wonderful that they celebrated J.C.'s birthday, but they included his brother, too. They have always included him in everything."

When J.C.'s diagnosis first appeared likely, he spent about a month in Houston undergoing comprehensive testing to determine the best course of treatment. For Kathy, that month was stressful enough. She cannot imagine what it would have been like to have been required to travel outside of the Valley for all of J.C.'s care over the last three years.

"I don't know what we would have done," Kathy said. "We would have had to move to Houston. That would have been a drastic change for us. It's such a big city. We're from a little town—we know each other's secrets. When we were up there for 30 days, we hid out in the hotel.

We were afraid we'd get lost. Thank goodness they brought this home."
