



*The Vannie E. Cook Jr.*

# CHILDREN'S CANCER AND HEMATOLOGY CLINIC

**BCM**  
Baylor College of Medicine



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## Junior League Helps Fund Clinic Expansion

Construction of a long-awaited art room and laboratory space at the Vannie E. Cook Jr. Children's Cancer and Hematology Clinic has been made possible by a generous donation from the Junior League of McAllen.

After treating almost 3,000 patients in its 5 years of operation, the clinic is expanding to meet the increasing need of its services. The Junior League stepped in to help fund the expansion of two of those areas—a full-service laboratory and an Arts In Medicine room.

When a child is diagnosed with cancer or a blood disorder, blood tests become a way of life—literally. The blood test results help doctors determine a diagnosis and then an appropriate course of treatment. More than 90 percent of the clinic's patients are required to have a CBC (complete blood count) prior to each visit.

Funding from the Junior League will help create the space to house a technologically-advanced CBC blood analyzer which will process patient lab work in-house, significantly decrease patient wait time and eliminate the time and expense required to travel to an outside lab.

Though the physical well-being of the patients is the primary concern, the psychosocial aspect is not forgotten. Cancer or blood disorder diagnoses take a tremendous toll on



*Dr. Rodrigo Erana, Cindee Godinez, Junior League President, Teresa Kache, Chairman - Arts In Medicine, Cathleen Tredaway, Chairman - Community Research, Lisa Keller, Junior League President (2005-06) and Dr. Juan Carlos Bernini, Medical Director.*

the emotional, mental, and spiritual well-being of patients and their families.

The Arts In Medicine program, which is modeled after the program at Texas Children's Hospital in Houston, was established to give the children and their siblings an outlet for self-expression, a mechanism through which they could

*(continued on page 3)*

## Zavalas Find Help at Home after Cancer Diagnosis

Joe and Maria Zavala are used to a hectic life; after all they have five children. Their most immense challenge yet, however, came in January of this year.

Their 14-year-old daughter, Maria, had "a ball the size of a small button," as her mother describes, on her left leg. Not causing Maria any pain, it seemed like no cause for concern.

Three months later, that changed. The ball had doubled in size and had become very painful. Unfortunately, Maria, like the rest of her family, is uninsured. Her father makes just enough that the family does not qualify for Medicaid, Children's Health Insurance Program, or other



*Maria Zavala has served as an inspiration to her family and others with the strength she has shown in her battle with cancer.*

programs, but too little for them to afford insurance on their own. Despite this, Maria's family found a way to get her to a doctor. They were referred to a specialist but did not have the money to follow through on the referral.

Maria's pain was becoming unbearable and she was beginning to have difficulty with physical tasks. Her parents took her back to the doctor who immediately recognized the urgency of the situation. The physician contacted Dr. Rodrigo Eraña at the Vannie E. Cook Jr. Children's Clinic. Eraña suggested Maria be brought in and upon examining her, he quickly scheduled a biopsy.

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*Dr. Juan Carlos Bernini and Laura Martinez Ilgun, at left, accept a check from students at the Science Academy.*

## Rockin' for a Cure

The Science Academy student-run radio station KQSA 93.50 FM recently sponsored "Rockin' For A Cure," a teen and child cancer benefit concert. The concert was held on the grounds of the Science Academy of South Texas in Mercedes. A total of 10 local bands entertained hundred of students and fans and raised over \$1,700 to help local children who are patients at the Vannie Cook Clinic. Pictured above presenting a check to Dr. Juan Carlos Bernini, medical director for the clinic, are Science Academy students Sarah Dill, Jose Arredondo, Maggie Tominey and Laura Martinez Ilgun, director of development and public relations.

## Ride and Walk

The second annual Walk and Ride for Life, sponsored by Team McAllen Cycling, raised over \$4,000 for the Vannie E. Cook Jr. Children's Cancer and Hematology Clinic. Cyclists and walkers of all ages joined the fun to support the Clinic's efforts to continue providing state-of-the-art care to children battling cancer in the Rio Grande Valley.

Team McAllen Cycling has been in existence for over 25 years to better our community of South Texas through the sport of cycling. The purpose of the organization is to provide opportunities, promotion and education of recreational and competitive cycling.

"On behalf of Team McAllen Cycling it was an honor and pleasure to organize the 2nd Annual Ride and Walk for Life to benefit the Vannie E. Cook Jr. Children's Cancer and Hematology Clinic," said Letty Zavala, Team McAllen president.



*Cyclists joined walkers for the annual event to raise funds for the clinic.*

"We had over 275 participants and 100 volunteers. Thanks to all who made this wonderful event a great success!"

Shown are members of "Team McAllen Cycling" preparing to start the ride. Some cyclists rode up to 100 miles to honor the many young children who are patients at the Vannie Cook Clinic.



*Patty Fallek leads a group of her friends in a salsa dancing fundraiser.*

## Patty's Party

Vannie E. Cook Jr. Cancer Foundation board member Patty Fallek invited hundreds of her close friends and family to "Come Have a Little Salsa With Your Eggs"—a fun-filled brunch and salsa dancing class to celebrate her "60th" birthday. In lieu of gifts, Patty, a cancer survivor, asked her guests to make monetary donations to the Vannie E. Cook Jr. Children's Cancer and Hematology Clinic. An overwhelming \$30,000 was raised to insure that local children with cancer have access to the best care and treatment available.

"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," she said. "Many of these children will die if not provided the necessary treatment for their diseases right here in McAllen."



# Vannie E. Cook Jr. Cancer Foundation Board Elects Three New Members

**T**hree new members have been elected to the Vannie E. Cook Jr. Cancer Foundation's board of trustees. The foundation, together with Baylor College of Medicine and Texas Children's Hospital, opened the Vannie E. Cook Jr. Children's Cancer and Hematology Clinic in 2001 in McAllen.

The three newest members of the 32-member board are Mark Montalvo, Melissa Smith and Gerry Guerra.



Montalvo

## Mark Montalvo

Son of the former McAllen mayor, Leo Montalvo, Mark Montalvo has an inherent interest in the health of the Rio Grande Valley. He completed his undergraduate studies at Texas A&M and earned his law degree from Texas Tech. He vehemently maintains that he is an Aggie, not a Red Raider.

Montalvo became interested in serving on the VCF board when he learned about its mission and reputation for being able to help children, no matter what their socio-economic situation.

"I am proud to be a member of the VCF," he said. "It is a blessing to have such a facility as the Vannie E. Cook Jr. Clinic in our community and I am looking forward to working to make sure it stays here and continues its tradition of unselfishness and altruism."

Montalvo has also served on many other boards including the McAllen Community Development Block Grant Advisory Board and the South Texas Center for Entrepreneurship and Economic Development (CEED) Advisory Board.

## Melissa Smith

Melissa Smith's personal experiences with friends, patients, doctors and staff at the Vannie E. Cook Jr. Clinic made her realize that she simply had to get involved.

"It has made me realize that no day should be taken for granted," she said. "God has granted me health and the extra time needed to lend a helping hand."

Having always focused much of her volunteer energy on bettering the lives of local children and her genuine concern over the high rate of pediatric cancer in the Rio Grande Valley, a position on VCF board was the perfect fit.

She and her husband, Roland Smith, owners of Frank Smith Toyota, have been generous donors to the clinic and



Smith

Melissa also served on the first Junior League of McAllen Arts In Medicine committee in the clinic.



Guerra

## Gerry Guerra

When he and his wife's oldest child Zack was diagnosed with acute lymphoblastic leukemia at the age of three, Gerry experienced first-hand the difficulties of childhood cancer.

Zack was treated at Santa Rosa Children's Hospital in San Antonio, where Guerra noticed many of the patients were also children from the Rio Grande Valley. With the opening of the Vannie E. Cook Jr. Cancer and Hematology Clinic in 2001, the inconvenience, stress and expense of traveling to large cities for care was eliminated.

"I feel that my experience with my son qualifies me to bring a unique perspective to the VCF board," he said. "I know first-hand what life is like for the families here at Vannie Cook Cancer Clinic."

Zack is now 15 and cancer-free. "Nothing short of a miracle," his father said, and Guerra will be able to help families like his through his membership on the VCF board.

His family, through the Guerra Brothers Successors, Ltd., is also one of the clinic's largest private donors. Their generosity made construction of the new chemotherapy and infusion area, as well a renovation of the laboratory, possible.

## Junior League *(continued from page 1)*

develop coping skills and a chance to empower themselves, all of which is believed to help the healing process.

"The Junior League of McAllen has, from the very beginning, been one of our greatest community partners," said Laura Ilgun, executive director of the Vannie E. Cook Jr. Cancer Foundation and director of development and public relations for the Vannie E. Cook Jr. Children's Cancer and Hematology Clinic.

"Thanks to the continued partnership and aid of the Junior League, the Clinic has an Arts In Medicine nook and program where Junior League members volunteer their time to provide arts and crafts activities for patients and their siblings. We also will soon have an in-house laboratory to immediately process lab work and improve the quality of care for all our patients."

# Vannie Cook Clinic and Foundation Enjoys Support from Donors

We express our appreciation to all of our friends and supporters and to the following whose donations and pledges were made during the period of September 1, 2005 to June 30, 2006.

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## Vannie E. Cook Jr. Board Hosts “A Tea Under The Trees”

The Board of Directors of The Vannie E. Cook Jr. Cancer Foundation, Inc., hosted, A Tea Under The Trees, to benefit local children with cancer and blood disorders who are patients at The Vannie E. Cook Jr. Children’s Cancer and Hematology Clinic.

The tea was held on the grounds of the Elmore House, located at McAllen Country Club. Over 200 people attended the morning event and toured the historical house, which was built in 1941. It was generously furnished by LFD home furnishings specifically for the fundraiser. Music was provided by musicians from the Valley Symphony Orchestra.



*The Valley Symphony Orchestra performs at ‘A Tea Under The Trees’.*



*Mrs. Carolyn Landrum*



*Bennie and Charles Thompson*

The tea, which was the vision of Vannie E. Cook Jr. Cancer Foundation board member, Mrs. Bennie Thompson, helped raise more than \$30,000.

Major sponsors and donors were Mr. and Mrs. Morris Atlas, Mrs. Carolyn Cook Landrum, LFD home furnishings, Mr. Cande Ontiveros, Mrs. Melissa Ontiveros, Frank Smith Toyota, Mr. and Mrs. Charles E. Thompson, Texas State Bank, Mrs. Margaret Wells and Valley Symphony Orchestra.

### Help at Home *(continued from page 1)*

The biopsy confirmed their worst fears—cancer. Maria was diagnosed with osteosarcoma, a type of bone cancer and the sixth most common form of cancer in children.

The Zavala family was in shock. Maria’s mother describes it as simply unbelievable.

“I spent so many nights crying,” she said. “It is unbelievable that your daughter can go from having a small ball in her leg, something you don’t think is serious, to realizing and having to accept it’s as grave as cancer.”

In May, Maria had her left leg amputated at Texas Children’s Hospital in Houston. Since the amputation, her father carries her often, said Maria’s mom, and he tells her “I’ll take care of you forever—I’ll be your leg.”

Throughout her ordeal, Maria has displayed great strength and resolve. Her brothers and sisters were very

scared when they found out she had cancer, said Maria’s mom, and the whole family worried about her losing her leg and how it would impact her. Maria has always said she has nothing to be ashamed of—she lost her leg due to an illness that she has to battle. She has not stopped socializing and hasn’t hidden, said her mother with great pride; she has faith and knows that God has a purpose for her life.

Maria, now 15, is doing quite well. Her family attributes this to having the Vannie E. Cook Jr Clinic in McAllen. “It’s a blessing,” said Maria’s mom, “we didn’t have the money or the time, with the other children and my husband’s job, to be traveling to and from Houston—because of this clinic we were able to see doctors and receive treatment close to home.”

## Planned Giving Helps Treat Local Children with Cancer

**D**id you know that you can use part of your estate to help treat children with cancer? There are four common types of bequests:

- **Percentage Bequest** – You specify a certain percentage of your total estate be given to the clinic.
- **Fixed Dollar Bequest** – You designate a specific amount of money to be given to the clinic.
- **Residual Bequest** – You specify that all remaining assets of the estate, after bequests to heirs and beneficiaries, be given to the clinic.
- **Contingent Bequest** – You specify that, of all heirs and beneficiaries named in your will are deceased, the estate be given to the clinic.

For more information, speak with your attorney or contact Laura Martinez Ilgun at 956-661-9840.

## Generous Donors *(continued from page 4)*

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