



The Vannie E. Cook Jr.

CHILDREN'S CANCER AND HEMATOLOGY CLINIC

BCM
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Community leader gives hope to the children of the Vannie Cook Clinic

Ana Bergh joined the board of the Vannie E. Cook Jr. Cancer Foundation in 2004, but after touring the children's cancer and hematology clinic last fall, she felt like she had to be involved in way that had a more direct impact on the young patients being treated there.

The clinic is a joint effort of the Vannie E. Cook Jr. Cancer Foundation, Baylor College of Medicine and Texas Children's Hospital and is the region's first and only state-of-the-art pediatric hematology/oncology clinic.

Bergh, a native of El Salvador who has lived in the Rio Grande Valley since 1971, recalled seeing children receiving cancer treatment and their families in the waiting area. "It tugged at my heart and while serving on the board has been very important work, I felt I could do something even more effective."

She promptly decided that she would make a charitable gift of \$1 million to the Vannie Cook Clinic. She called her



Ana Bergh

four children, who supported her decision completely. "My children are very generous," she said. "I think our generous spirit comes from the fact that we are from a very needy culture where people struggle for every penny. When I was young, we were poor, but I wasn't really aware of it then. My father made enormous sacrifices."

Bergh's requirement of her gift was that it provide care, medicine and anything a child could need during the course of treatment rather than fund buildings. "I want my money to go directly to services for the children," she said. "A building on its own doesn't mean much without money to support the services inside of it."

"Mrs. Bergh's commitment to the future of the clinic is admirable and her compassion and concern for our patients is absolutely extraordinary," said Dr. Carlos Bernini, medical director of the clinic. "We are truly grateful for her generosity—it gives us all hope."

(continued on page 3)

Patient and his family relieved to find services close to home



Gabriel Charleston, left, with his brother, David, and mom, Shereen

After 3-year-old Gabriel Charleston was diagnosed with leukemia last year, he started receiving treatment at the Vannie E. Cook Jr. Children's Cancer and Hematology Clinic (VCCC). His mom, Shereen, was relieved—and somewhat surprised—to find out that her son really didn't mind going to the clinic for chemotherapy.

"Even though he goes there to get chemo and he knows he feels sick afterward, he gets along with everyone and doesn't mind going to the clinic," she said. "It's like he knows it's for his own good."

There's one person in particular who stands out in the heart of the little boy—nurse Jaime Rodriguez.

The two have a special relationship, Shereen said. Gabriel seems to look at Jaime as a positive male figure in his life, she said.

Shereen has also received a lot of support from the staff at Vannie Cook. "Everyone at the clinic is family," she said with tears in her eyes. "I see so much humanity in the clinic, so much love and attention for all the patients."

She first suspected something was wrong with her son when he became lethargic and pale and started developing bruising and nosebleeds. When blood work by his pediatrician came back abnormal, Shereen was directed to the emergency room, where

(continued on page 5)

Motorola associates partner with clinic

Laura Martinez Ilgun, director of development and public relations, accepts a check from Motorola Enterprises associates Sandy Ramirez, Joel Reyes, Gilbert Acevedo, Horacio Flores and Pete Mendiola. Also pictured are clinic staff members Dr. Rodrigo Eraña, Janie Avila, R.N., and Dr. Juan Carlos Bernini, clinic medical director. Motorola has supported the clinic through various events and fundraisers.



Motorola supports Vannie Cook Clinic

New Chemotherapy and Infusion Room grand opening

Richard Cortez, mayor of the city of McAllen, center, was an honored guest at the November grand opening of a new chemotherapy area at the Vannie Cook Clinic. Pictured with the mayor are, from left, Dr. David Poplack of Texas Children's Cancer Center, Laura Martinez Ilgun, City Commissioner John Ingram and his son and Dr. Ken Landrum, chair of the Vannie E. Cook Jr. Cancer Foundation.



Mayor speaks at opening

U.S. Sen. John Cornyn meets with Vannie Cook Cancer Foundation Board Members

Sen. John Cornyn visited the Vannie Cook Clinic Oct. 18 to tour the facility and receive a briefing from the board of directors on the important work that the clinic does to fight children's cancer in South Texas. Pictured with Sen. Cornyn are board members Bennie Thompson, Mary Lou Trevino, Patty Fallek, Marlee Payne, Maria Teresa Garza, Dr. Ken Landrum, Kathy Collins, Julie Powers, Maxine Guerra and Bennie McDonald.



Sen. Cornyn tours clinic

Students raise funds for art supplies

McAllen Memorial High School students sold t-shirts and raised more than \$2,000 for art supplies for the Arts in Medicine Program at the Vannie Cook Clinic. The fundraiser was organized in memory of Satesh Whadwani. Pictured are Sareena Whadwani, Selma Whadwani and Dr. Juan Carlos Bernini, clinic medical director.



Raising funds for Arts in Medicine

New nurse practitioner feels ‘privileged’ to work with Vannie Cook patients and families

Ruth Anne Herring joined the Vannie E. Cook Jr. Children’s Cancer and Hematology Clinic in January as a pediatric nurse practitioner, but she’s been aware of the needs of cancer and hematology patients in the Rio Grande Valley for many years.

Herring, R.N., M.S.N., C.P.N.P, C.P.O.N., worked for 20 years in pediatric oncology at the University of Texas Medical Branch in Galveston and for six years at the Texas Children’s Cancer Center in Houston, and she met many patients and families who traveled a long way for treatment.

“I saw first-hand the sacrifice and strain these families endured in order to give their child the best available health care,” she said.

She spent six months working at the Brownsville Community Center in 1994, learning even more about health care for children in the Rio Grande Valley. A year later she and a pediatric oncology colleague researched the possibility of opening a children’s oncology clinic in the area. They were disappointed to learn that the effort to open such a specialized clinic was beyond their scope.

But Herring was inching closer to working full time with patients in the Valley. In 2001, the Galveston native accepted a job at the Texas Children’s Cancer Center in Houston, a position that shaped her clinical skills and understanding of the role of the nurse practitioner in pediatric oncology. That led her to a temporary assignment at Vannie Cook in December 2004, and when the opportunity to work there full-time came along earlier this year, she grasped it.

“Fortunately, the Vannie Cook Clinic and its association with Texas Children’s Cancer Center and Baylor College of Medicine has helped close the gap between needs and resources for many patients and families here in the Valley,” said Herring, a clinical instructor in Baylor College of Medicine’s Department of Pediatrics–Hematology/Oncology. “We can’t change the fact that a child has cancer, but now we can help ease some of a parent’s or patient’s concerns with strong support—right here at home.”

Herring attended the University of Texas and later the University of Texas School of Nursing at Galveston. She enjoyed the challenges of nursing, but she became involved with pediatric hematology/oncology by accident. She needed a job, and when she applied at the hospital she was assigned to that unit.

“I thought it would be really depressing,” she said. “But I decided to work there for the summer, then transfer somewhere else later. Well, that was in 1979 and I never did request the transfer.

“It’s been a privilege to work with these patients and their families through the years—to share in the good times and bad—and to learn with them that the diagnosis of cancer can also bring positive experiences.”



Ruth Anne Herring

Ana Bergh gives hope *(continued from page 1)*

Bergh hopes that her gift will encourage other people to make a charitable gift of their own. “No gift is too small,” she said.

There are many ways to make a charitable gift to help maintain the financial stability of the Vannie Cook Clinic. Mrs. Bergh’s gift will be paid over the next two years and will immediately help patients. However, her gift also includes a unique component that will ensure that her desire to serve patients is met. With her attorney’s help, Mrs. Bergh drafted a codicil to her will that included a specific bequest to the Vannie Cook Clinic providing that if any of the \$1 million pledge is unpaid at the time of her death, the remaining amount will be fulfilled from her estate.

A bequest through a deferred will is one of the easiest and most common types of gifts. It does not draw on assets during a donor’s lifetime and can be estate distributions of cash, securities, real estate or personal

property. Types of bequests include a specific bequest, a percentage bequest and a residual bequest. Additionally, important estate tax savings can result from a bequest or other planned gifts.

For more information on making an outright or deferred gift to benefit the Vannie E. Cook Jr. Children’s Cancer and Hematology Clinic, contact the Baylor College of Medicine Office of Development at 713-798-4714 or your own estate planner.

Suggested wording for a bequest:

“I give the sum of \$_____ in cash [or “I give _____ percent of the residue of my estate] to Baylor College of Medicine, of Houston, Texas, to be used for the Vannie E. Cook Jr. Cancer and Hematology Clinic.”

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(continued on page 6)

New group focuses on needs of teens dealing with cancer

Having cancer is hard for any child, but teen-aged cancer patients face additional struggles that younger patients often don't have to deal with. Now they can turn to the teen support group at the Vannie E. Cook Jr. Children's Cancer and Hematology Clinic.

The group's kick-off party was held last August, and since then there have been other events, including pizza parties, movie night and an afternoon of bowling.

The group is very important for teen patients, who can often feel a range of emotions, such as anger, sadness, denial and fear, explained Jessica Zuniga, social worker at the Vannie Cook Cancer Clinic.

"They often don't realize that it's okay to feel those emotions, but this group gives them a place to express their feelings with others who understand exactly what they are going through," she said. "It validates for them that what they are feeling is completely normal and that they are not alone in their long journey."

Teens and younger children face many of the same issues when battling cancer, Zuniga said, but in addition, teens struggle with body image. "They're dealing with the onset of puberty so there's already a focus on their bodies changing. On top of that, now they have to deal with things like losing their hair. That's very hard for an adolescent to deal with. They are afraid of being rejected by their peers."

The teen support group was initiated through the efforts of Lynnea Olivarez, a local Girl Scout who was working



Anita Perry greets Daniela Villarreal

Daniela Villarreal touched the heart of everyone she met, and her generous spirit helped launch a campaign to raise \$25,000 for the first VienViewer Imaging System in South Texas. Her efforts made it all the way to the office of the First Lady of Texas, Anita Perry, and on May 15, Perry visited the Vannie Cook Clinic to announce a \$10,000 gift toward the purchase of the technologically advanced vein detecting device, which helps young patients who visit the clinic feel less pain.

toward earning the Gold Scout Award, the highest award given by the organization. After learning of Lynnea's goals, clinic manager Stefany Levrier suggested organizing an event to launch the group.

To learn more about the Teen Support Group at the Vannie Cook Clinic, contact Jessica Zuniga at 956-661-9840 or jxzuniga@txccc.org.

Help at Home *(continued from page 1)*

Dr. Rodrigo Eraña of the VCCC was called in to consult.

Dr. Eraña put her at ease from the start, Shereen said. "He sat there for hours and answered every question, discussed every doubt and fear with me. He was very honest, and he educated me on the upcoming process, procedures and the diagnosis. We even talked about survival rates. He instilled me with hope."

Gabriel initially received treatment four times a week, but now he is on a maintenance protocol, which requires treatment just once a month. Shereen and her family, including another son, 11-year-old David, have faced many challenges along the way.

A single mother, Shereen has had to juggle full-time employment, coordinating medical appointments and insurance issues. She couldn't afford the insurance offered through her employer and did not qualify for Medicaid or CHIP, so Gabriel was uninsured at the time of his diagnosis.

But social workers at Vannie Cook have helped her apply for various programs to cover medical costs and assisted in organizing claims and appealing denials. Just as important, staff have always worked with her schedule as much as possible.

"They are always conscientious of the whole family and the fact that we are all battling this together."

Shereen knows what it's like not to have health care services available close to home. Her oldest son's father was diagnosed with cancer about nine years ago, and the family eventually relocated to Houston. After her husband passed away, she said it took a long time to rebuild her life.

"If it weren't for the Vannie Cook Clinic, I could see us having to relocate, leave family, lose our support, jobs and belongings all over again," said. "It's a blessing not to have to go somewhere else for treatment and that we can find attention here in the Valley—not just local care, but attentive, loving, family-oriented care."

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