



The Vannie E. Cook Jr.

CHILDREN'S CANCER AND HEMATOLOGY CLINIC

BCM[®]
Baylor College of Medicine



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Fall 2008

Generous Gift Advances Childhood Cancer Treatment

A move to McAllen more than 48 years ago proved to be a very good decision for now retired pathologist, Dr. Domingo H. Useda. It was in this community that he grew a successful pathology practice and raised his six children.

"It was quite important to me and my family to give back to the community in a meaningful way in return for the acceptance and support we enjoyed all these years," said Dr. Useda.

Useda recently made a gift of \$200,000 to the Vannie E. Cook Jr. Cancer Foundation, whose current and sole mission is to provide support for the Vannie E. Cook Jr. Children's Cancer and Hematology Clinic.

Inspired by the two organizations' goal of filling a void in the region for pediatric cancer treatment, Dr. Useda pledged his future support, primarily to help sustain the clinic's laboratory services.

As a pathologist, Dr. Useda diagnosed numerous cancer cases through out his career, but it was the cases involving children that would most break his heart. "Cancer is a cruel, ominous disease for anyone, but somehow when it attacks children, its ravages are the cruelest. The children that survive might reveal specific clues for the



Dr. Domingo H. Useda

extinction of this sinister disease," he said.

In January 2008, the Vannie Cook Clinic opened a critically needed lab and six months later, named it for Dr. Useda. He described this honor as unexpected and splendid. The clinic hopes to expand its services by adding a flow cytometry lab to rapidly and accurately confirm a cancer diagnosis and initiate life-saving therapy.

"When a child is diagnosed with cancer or a blood disorder, blood tests literally become a way of life," said Dr. Juan Carlos Bernini, the clinic's medical director. "The new in-house lab has helped decrease patient wait time and has eliminated the need for our patients to go to an outside lab. Expanding our services to include flow cytometry will take this facility to a new level. We are very grateful for Dr. Useda's generosity and commitment to the children of this community who deserve care of the highest quality."

"Undoubtedly I am quite biased in thinking that laboratory medicine has a big role in the diagnosis and proper treatment of cancer," said Dr. Useda. "Our children are our future. Those that survive cancer will reward us, those that do not would have been given hope and compassion during their treatment," he said.

Houston Couple Gives Generously and Brings Joy to Local Families

Don and Sydney Faust's commitment to helping children with cancer began over 10 years ago when they first met patients of Texas Children's Cancer Center in Houston. Since then they have pledged generous support to the Houston center and have hosted more than 30 family retreats at their Squirrel Creek Ranch, giving young cancer patients, and their families, the chance to leave their worries behind and enjoy a weekend of fun and togetherness.

When the Faust's learned of the needs of the Vannie Cook Clinic and the children of South Texas, they quickly responded with a generous gift of \$100,000 and asked others in the Houston area to join them.

But, the Faust's did not stop there. They also added a fifth yearly retreat at the ranch so that cancer patients from

(continued on page 5)



We Won a Wii! On-Line Competition Brings Smiles to Seriously Ill Children

Young patients at the Vannie E. Cook Jr. Children's Cancer and Hematology Clinic now have the chance to play tennis and go bowling when they come in for treatments and appointments. On the new Nintendo Wii gaming system, that is!

For one month, "Vote For The Vannie Cook Clinic" e-mail messages traveled all over the state and country. At the end, Vannie Cook Clinic supporters were victorious and won two Starlight Starbright Fun Centers.

The competition was co-sponsored by Colgate Palmolive and

the Starlight Starbright Foundation. The centers include a Nintendo Wii that seriously ill children can enjoy anywhere in the clinic setting and are designed to help them and their families cope with the pain, fear and isolation of illness.

"The new Fun Center in our chemotherapy area helps our young patients forget about their condition for a while," said clinic nurse Jaime Rodriguez. "It helps them remember they can still have fun, and it makes caring for them a little less stressful too."



Pictured above is 16 year-old Juan Juarez, the first patient to play with one of the the new Fun Centers. Juan is pictured with Diego Villarreal.

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Friends for Hope Combines Fun with Fundraising



Since organizing in 2004, Friends for Hope has raised more than \$50,000 for the Vannie Cook Clinic. The young adult group also has hosted holiday parties for patients and their families and contributed hundreds of volunteer hours.

"The Vannie Cook Children's Clinic is a great organization to support because it benefits some of our most needy local children," said Brianne Santos, President of Friends for Hope. "When you look at these children that are affected by cancer, you can see how special they are. They are definitely worth fighting for."

"The Vannie Cook Clinic makes sure that no child is left behind without treatment," Brianne said. "It's such a blessing that these children can stay close to home."

For more information about joining or supporting Friends for Hope, please contact Laura Martinez Ilgun at lmilgun@txccc.org.

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Moonbeans Coffee Brews Clinic Support

Moonbeans Coffee is brewing up support for the Vannie Cook Cancer Clinic.

The locally owned and operated coffee shop donates 5 percent of all proceeds from the Moonbeans Star Card to the VCCC to help provide care and treatment to low-income children.

The inspiration for the Moonbeans Star Card was a sweet

young cancer patient, Daniela Villarreal, who at a very young age developed a love for coffee and became a regular customer of Moonbeans Coffee in McAllen.

Daniela lost her battle with leukemia in August of 2007, but her memory lives on with the Moonbeans owners, Sandra and Luis Beltran. They began the Star

Card program as an ongoing fundraiser to help the Clinic and to honor Daniela.

Daniela's only canvas painting is featured on the Star Card and hangs prominently in the coffee shop. "I wanted her spirit to always be with us," Luis Beltran said.



Pictured at Moonbeans is Laura Martinez Ilgun, Vannie Cook Clinic Director of Development, Claudia Tapia, shop manager and Luis Beltran, owner.

Two Valley Couples Unite for Hope and Healing

When Letty Zavala and Elena Luna met at church five years ago little did they know the great impact their newfound friendship would have on local children.

Elena and her husband, Ruben, lost their daughter Linda to acute lymphocytic leukemia in October 2000, and Letty wanted to organize a cycling event in Linda's honor. Letty was also looking for a worthwhile group for the event to support.

"We had recently learned about the opening of the Vannie Cook Children's Clinic and were glad to recommend them," said Elena.

When the Luna's daughter was diagnosed with leukemia, she had to undergo treatment in Houston, so they knew first hand the importance of having the services of the Vannie Cook Clinic available to children with cancer in the Rio Grande Valley.

"The Vannie Cook Clinic provides much-needed health care for Valley children who otherwise would have to travel out of the area to get the caliber of medical care they provide," Elena said. "A local support network is a welcome blessing that helps families better cope with the seriousness of the situation."

Letty was motivated to organize Ride for Life because she wanted an opportunity to make a difference in a child's life. The Lunas feel they are memorializing their daughter's life by helping others. The Zavalas and the Lunas annual fundraiser has raised more than \$40,000 for the state-of-the-art facility.



Oscar and Letty Zavala and Elena and Ruben Luna.

Meet the Providers



Juan Carlos Bernini, M.D.

Juan Carlos Bernini is medical director of the Vannie Cook Clinic and an assistant professor, department of pediatrics, section of hematology-oncology at Baylor College of Medicine. He is a Board Certified pediatric hematologist/oncologist with 18 years of experience.

Dr. Bernini attended medical school in Costa Rica, where he also completed a pediatric residency. In 1990, Dr. Bernini relocated to the United States, where he completed his fellowship in pediatric hematology/oncology at the University of Texas Southwestern Medical School and Children's Medical Center at Dallas, Texas.

Dr. Bernini accepted the role of associate director of Cook Children's Specialty Clinic in Midland, Texas, in June of 1997, where he served until he became the medical director of the Vannie E. Cook Jr. Children's Cancer and Hematology Clinic in March 2001.



Rodrigo Eraña, M.D.

Rodrigo Eraña is an assistant professor, department of pediatrics, section of hematology-oncology at Baylor College of Medicine. He is a Board Certified pediatric hematologist/oncologist with 10 years of experience.

Dr. Eraña attended medical school in Mexico. In 1995, Dr. Eraña relocated to the United States, where he completed his internship and residency in pediatrics at Massachusetts General Hospital. He served as a fellow in pediatric hematology/oncology at the Texas Children's Hospital in Houston from 1998 to 2002. Upon completion of his fellowship, Dr. Eraña joined the team at Vannie E. Cook Jr. Children's Cancer and Hematology Clinic.



Ruth Anne Herring, R.N., M.S.N., C.P.N.P., C.P.O.N.

Ruth Anne Herring is a clinical instructor, department of pediatrics, section of hematology-oncology at Baylor College of Medicine with 20 years of experience in pediatric hematology/oncology.

Herring received both her bachelor of science in nursing and masters of science in nursing from the University of Texas Medical Branch in Galveston, Texas. She served as a pediatric nurse practitioner for the pediatric hematology/oncology department at UTMB Galveston from 1988 until 1998, when she joined the staff at Texas Children's Hospital in Houston. While at Texas Children's Hospital, Herring occasionally received temporary assignments to the Vannie E. Cook Jr. Children's Cancer and Hematology Clinic and decided to join the team at the clinic full-time in January 2007.

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 over \$100 were made during the period of **July 1, 2007 to June 30, 2008**. We also extend deepest gratitude for the many gifts and in-kind donations that bring joy to our patients.

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(continued on page 6)

Texas First Lady Anita Perry Speaks at Childhood Cancer Awareness Event

A gracious Anita Perry, First Lady of Texas, emphasized such health care issues such as cancer awareness, the nursing shortage and heart disease prevention at a heartwarming Gold Ribbon Luncheon honoring young patients at the Vannie Cook Cancer Clinic.

Mrs. Perry was the special guest and featured speaker at the luncheon, held Sept. 18, 2007, at the McAllen Country Club. With generous support from local businesses and individuals, the event raised \$50,000.

The gold ribbon is the official symbol of children worldwide suffering from cancer and was the theme of the sold out event, which was held during Childhood Cancer Awareness Month to bring



Dr. Ken Landrum, First Lady Anita Perry and Mrs. Carolyn Landrum

attention to childhood cancer and survivorship issues across the country. "We want our local community to not only know about childhood cancer nationwide, but also about how drastically it affects so many children right here in the Rio Grande Valley," said Dr. Ken Landrum, Chairman, Vannie E. Cook Jr. Cancer Foundation.

"The good news is that today, almost 75 percent of young cancer patients are cured of their disease. Our local children can now receive the

best care and treatment available right here at the Vannie Cook Clinic and, most importantly, they can stay home with their families and friends," he said.

Ways to Give

Individuals or organizations interested in giving to the Vannie E. Cook Jr. Children's Cancer Clinic may make an unrestricted gift in general support of the clinic or designate the gift to a specific program or service.

Donations may be:

- An immediate gift to the clinic of cash, check or credit card
- A pledge or multi-year commitment
- A monthly donation
- A gift of stock or other assets
- A gift in tribute - memorials, honoraria, birthdays or anniversaries
- A planned gift - bequests, charitable gift annuities, trusts or life insurance
- A gift-in-kind or gift of your time

Four-Year-Old Cancer Patient's Love for Books Brings Community Together

Little Emily Hinsley of Mission loved to read, but while she was a patient at the Vannie E. Cook Jr. Children's Cancer and Hematology Clinic, she discovered books were in short supply.

With her brothers Ronnie and Justin, Emily made it her goal to collect 500 new books. Once word of her quest spread throughout the community, 500 quickly grew to more than 2,000 books. Emily passed away on May 27, 2008, but the books will serve as a lasting memory of her love of reading and her desire to share that with other young patients.

"This child gave our our family such great purpose, and organizing the book drive was our way of giving something back to her and helping others too," said Michelle Hinsley, Emily's mother.

To learn more about Emily, visit www.caringbridge.org/tx/emilysfight/



Houston Couple... *(continued from page 1)*

the Vannie Cook Clinic could have a once in a lifetime experience to see exotic wildlife, swim, fish and play in a beautiful West Texas setting.

The Vannie Cook Clinic staff and patients were overwhelmed with emotion when they had the opportunity to host the Faustus and Scott Bassinger, Ph.D., associate dean of Baylor College of Medicine. When they entered the clinic, they were greeted by the familiar faces of children bearing gifts for Mrs. Faust. The Faustus and Dr. Bassinger toured the facility and interacted with staff and patients. "It's not often that such overwhelming support comes from people outside of our community. The Faustus genuinely care about children suffering from cancer, no matter where they're from or where they live," said Ilgun.

Donors *(continued from page 4)*

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To make a donation, contact Laura Martinez Ilgun at 956-661-9840 or lmilgun@txccc.org.