



The Vannie E. Cook Jr.

CHILDREN'S CANCER AND HEMATOLOGY CLINIC

BCM
Baylor College of Medicine

Texas Children's Cancer
and Hematology Centers



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www.vanniecookchildrensclinic.org • 101 W. Expressway 83, McAllen, Texas 78503

Fall 2012

Friends for Hope donates \$115,000 to Vannie Cook Clinic

Friends For Hope presented the Vannie E. Cook Jr. Children's Cancer and Hematology Clinic a \$115,000 check on July 12. This is the largest donation to date from this organization of young adults in the Rio Grande Valley dedicated to helping local children who are suffering from cancer and serious blood disorders.

"We could not be more proud of Friends for Hope for their continued commitment to our Clinic. It has been amazing to see their year-end donations jump from \$5,000 in their first year to \$115,000 in their seventh," said Laura Martinez Ilgun, Executive Director for the Vannie E. Cook Jr. Cancer Foundation.

Friends For Hope holds several events throughout the year to fundraise and create awareness for the Vannie Cook Clinic. Among them are a fishing tournament in May, a fall concert, monthly mixers and a Christmas party for the patients.



(Sitting) Tiffany Horne, Kacey Ruppert, Cristen Sonnier, Debbie Rivas; (Standing) Stefany Levrier, Laura Downing, Megan Morley, Dusty Davenport, Tommy Vela, Courtney Egan, Amy Booth, Philip Farias, Alfredo Montanaro, Joey Holand, Pablo Tagle, Brandon Hausenfluck, Lindsie Shuster, Sarah Hinojosa, Lori Villareal, Tammie Hartzog, Victoria Martinez and Laura Martinez Ilgun. Not Pictured: Samantha Barnett, Claudia Cantu, Somer East, Tina Guerra, Heather Marks, Will McCullough, Patti Nielsen-Hadden, Maribel Ramirez, Brianne Santos, Ryan Solis, Paola Villareal, Christine Wallace.

Young boy's diagnosis made easier thanks to Vannie Cook Clinic

Like many boys his age, Christopher Espinoza was active in sports, especially Tae Kwon Do and baseball. But when he started suffering from severe leg pains last year, the then 7-year-old was referred to the Vannie Cook Children's Cancer and Hematology Clinic in McAllen.

"It was scary but the doctors, nurses and staff at Vannie Cook were very helpful and reassuring. They gave me lots of information and explained everything to me very well," says Christopher's mother, Margaret Espinoza.

Christopher participated in a state Tae Kwon Do competition just one week before his diagnosis, where he did so well that he qualified to compete nationally. But while helping his father in the yard one day soon after the meet, he fell down and started experiencing pain in his leg.

He was taken to an after-hours clinic and was referred to an orthopedic specialist. An MRI revealed an abnormality and Christopher was referred to a specialist once more, this time a pediatric oncologist. Thinking they were going to have to wait

days to see a specialist in Dallas, the family felt fortunate to get an appointment the very next day with Dr. Juan Carlos Bernini, Medical Director of the Vannie Cook Clinic, who made a diagnosis of osteosarcoma, a type of bone cancer.



Christopher Espinoza and his mother, Margaret.

The youngster started treatment at the Vannie Cook Clinic but had to travel to Houston to undergo surgery to amputate his leg at Texas Children's Hospital. The decision to amputate was a difficult one. Christopher and his parents were fearful he would be wheelchair bound. He even told his mom, "Don't let them cut off my leg," Margaret recalls. But Christopher and his family overcame that fear and eventually moved forward with amputation after he experienced some complications during his treatment.

The medical trip to Houston was a hardship for the family, because only one parent could travel with Christopher while the other stayed at home with their 16-year-old son, who was born with a genetic disorder called Trisomy 18, or Edward's Syndrome.

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Clinic Happenings

2012 Radiothon helps bring childhood cancer awareness to the Valley

The 2012 Vannie Cook Radiothon raised a record breaking \$72,000 on Saturday, Feb. 25, 2012. The event was presented by **BMP Radio RGV** and title sponsor **Frank Smith Toyota**. Throughout the day, News/Talk 710 KURV, La Ley 102.5 & 92.7 FM, Digital 101.5 FM and Super Tejano 102.1/95.3 FM broadcasted live from the Vannie Cook Clinic. Listeners were inspired to give after hearing moving stories from the children in our community who battle a life-threatening illness each day. Phone bank volunteers answered calls for donations and pledges, and a special guest appearance was made by Hollywood rising star **Diego Boneta**.



(Left) Nicholas Peters, a cancer survivor, and his mom share their story on KURV. (Right) Arely Reyes, a current patient, donates to the Radiothon.

Robert Earl Keen concert presented by Friends for Hope

The 7th Annual Friends for Hope Charity Event was Oct. 29, 2011, at Las Palmas Race Park and featured country singer Robert Earl Keen. The event raised more than \$100,000! Those in attendance enjoyed great food, music and company.



Robert Earl Keen stands with Friends For Hope President Courtney Egan and Former President Joey Holand.

Friends for Hope bay fishing tournaments

The annual Friends For Hope Bay Fishing Tournaments have proven to be successful events. The tournaments were held May 2011 and May 2012 at Louie's Back Yard on South Padre Island. More than \$45,000 was raised for children in the Valley with cancer and serious blood disorders.

Friends for Hope bay fishing tournaments



(Top) Sisters Katherine and Melissa Hinojosa show off their catch. (Bottom left) Friends for Hope members Ryan Solis and Joey Holand proudly display their first place award. (Bottom right) Friends for Hope members and guests at the fishing tournament.

Doctors Hospital donation

When the Vannie Cook Clinic saw a greater than anticipated number of new patients and philanthropic support decrease due to a weak U.S. economy, it was faced with a great challenge of remaining true to its mission to care for all patients regardless of ability to pay. Doctors Hospital at Renaissance, however, responded to this critical need for funding

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Dr. Carlos Cardenas, Dr. Juan Carlos Bernini and Dr. Rodrigo Eraña share a moment with a patient.



Dr. Juan Carlos Bernini with Mr. Alonzo Cantu, DHR Board Member; Dr. David Poplack, Director of the Texas Children's Cancer Center; and Dr. Ken Landrum, Chairman of the Board of the Vannie Cook Cancer Foundation.

Care at Vannie Cook Clinic doesn't end when treatment is complete

Thanks to advances in diagnosis and treatment, childhood cancer survivorship rates are increasing. Today, nearly 80 percent of children diagnosed with cancer survive. There are more than 320,000 childhood cancer survivors in the United States.

Although they have overcome childhood cancer, this patient population still faces serious health issues. Some 70 percent of childhood cancer survivors will develop chronic medical problems related to their original diagnosis within 30 years, according to a 2006 study in the *New England Journal of Medicine*. Some of these health issues include infertility, secondary malignancies and organ dysfunction.

That's why the Vannie Cook Clinic is committed to providing care to childhood cancer survivors through its **Long Term Survivor Program** and a new web based support tool, **Passport for Care**, which helps follow childhood cancer survivors through adulthood. "Not every pediatric cancer treatment center continues to care for its patients into adulthood; however, at the Vannie E. Cook Jr. Children's Cancer and Hematology Clinic, we recognize that health concerns for childhood cancer patients do not end when their cancer treatment is successfully completed," said Dr. Juan Carlos Bernini, Medical Director at the Vannie Cook Clinic and Professor of Pediatrics at Baylor College of Medicine.

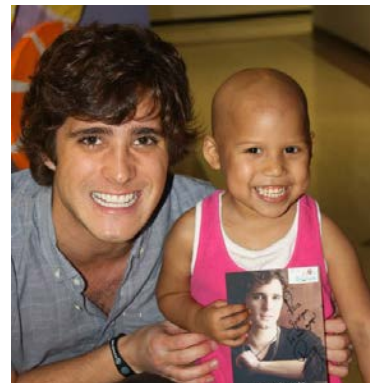


Doctors Hospital (continued from page 2)

at the Clinic with a generous \$360,000 donation. Dr. Carlos Cardenas, DHR Chairman of the Board, stated, "Doctors Hospital at Renaissance has always been a voice for the voiceless, which is consistent with our mission to provide excellent, high-quality care to all in our community. We are very proud to be able to contribute to and participate with the Vannie Cook Clinic in this way."

Young hollywood actor joins in the fight against childhood cancer

Rock of Ages star Diego Boneta has chosen to give back to the community where his mother was raised and where his grandmother still lives. For the past two years, Boneta has made a special appearance at the Clinic's Radiothon fundraiser. At the 2011 and 2012 events, fans of Boneta anxiously waited in line for a chance to have their picture taken with the young star. During his appearances, he spent time interacting with patients and talking about Vannie Cook on the air.



Diego Boneta and a Vannie Cook patient.

"Putting a smile on a kid's face puts a smile in my heart," Boneta said.

His commitment to the Clinic doesn't end with the annual Radiothons. Boneta was recently named one of *Variety Magazine's* Power of Youth honorees and has chosen the Vannie Cook Clinic to be the recipient of the event proceeds.

"We are extremely honored to be chosen as Diego's charity for this event. He could have chosen any national organization but instead chose to give back to children in the Rio Grande Valley," said Victoria Martinez, Director of Development for the Vannie Cook Clinic.

Hyundai Hope on Wheels supports pediatric cancer research

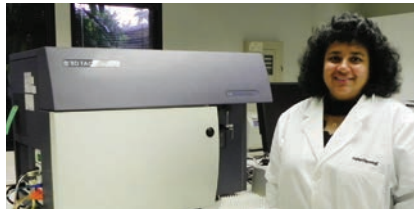
The South Texas Hyundai Dealers joined Hyundai Motor America in awarding the Vannie E. Cook Jr. Children's Cancer and Hematology Clinic with two Hyundai Grants totaling \$140,000. The funds were given to the Clinic to support its research programs. Rio Grande Valley Hyundai dealers Roland Smith, Don Johnson and Robert Vackar joined patients and staff at the check presentation and hand-print ceremony, where patients place colorful hand-prints on a Hyundai Santa Fe.



Pictured after the hand-print ceremony are Rio Grande Valley Hyundai dealers Roland Smith, Don Johnson and Robert Vackar with patient Olivia Torres and representatives from Hyundai America.

Clinic first in Valley to offer flow cytometry

The Vannie Cook Clinic will be the first in the Rio Grande Valley with flow cytometry technology. The new in-house laboratory will enable physicians to accurately



Flow cytometry at Vannie Cook.

and rapidly determine the immune cell origin of the cancer cells of young leukemia and lymphoma patients. The growing number of new patients seen at the Clinic each year made it necessary to expand its laboratory services to include flow cytometry.

“Access to an on-site flow cytometer will enhance and expedite care for a large number of children. Results are often within two hours, allowing us the opportunity to promptly diagnose and initiate treatment for our patients,” said Dr. Juan Carlos Bernini, Medical Director of the Clinic. “Currently these results can take up to 48 hours, but with this technology we will get them almost immediately, and life-saving treatment can start right away. A quick diagnosis also means that anxious parents and family members will not have to wait unnecessarily to learn the specific diagnostic information about their child’s illness and treatment plan.”

For more information, contact the clinic at 956-661-9840.

Diagnosis Made Easier

(continued from page 1)

Christopher made three trips to Houston but fortunately was able to complete his follow-up care at Vannie Cook. Before the clinic opened, families in the Rio Grande Valley had no choice but to take their children to Houston, San Antonio or elsewhere for all their treatment.

“It is so important that we have this clinic close to home,” says Margaret. “Traveling to and from Houston is not easy but we would have been separated for much longer if not for the Vannie Cook Clinic.”

Christopher remained positive throughout his treatment, his mother says. She recalls one day his sister saw him happily packing a bag before heading for treatment and asked him why he liked to go receive chemotherapy. He replied that it was simply something he had to do to get better.

He completed treatment in February 2012. Now 8, he is doing well. His mother describes him as talkative and active. He is adapting to a prosthetic leg and intends to play baseball again.

The family has remained involved with the Vannie Cook Clinic, even speaking at the Friends for Hope fishing tournament about their experience.

Christopher visits the Clinic once a month for checkups.

Second Chance poetry supports Clinic

Not many 14-year-olds can claim to be a published author. Not only has Giancarlo Bernini authored a book of poetry but his writing has helped raise money for patients at the Vannie Cook Cancer and Hematology Clinic.

Giancarlo was just 10 years old when he was first impacted by children with cancer at the Clinic, where his father, Dr. Juan Carlos Bernini, is medical director. He learned from his father that many of the children and their families cannot afford cancer treatment.

Giancarlo realized he wanted to support the clinic and its patients and turned to his talent for writing poetry as inspiration.

His book, “Second Chance,” is a compilation of more than 100 poems that offer inspiration, humor, joy and encouragement to cancer patients. “Second Chance” is illustrated by Vannie Cook Clinic patients.

To date, more than 2,000 copies of “Second Chance” have been sold, raising more than \$15,000 for the Vannie Cook Clinic and, just as important, raising awareness of childhood cancer.

“The project started out small, but thanks to so many in our community it has become a remarkable success, and now we can help pay for the treatment of cancer patients who normally wouldn’t be able to afford it,” said Laura Martinez Ilgun, Executive Director of the Vannie Cook Foundation.



Giancarlo Bernini, author of “Second Chance,” reads his book to patients.

A check presentation ceremony was held at the Clinic last December. Some of the 30 young patients who provided illustrations for the book joined Giancarlo for the presentation.

Purchase the book, donate to the Vannie Cook Clinic and find information about childhood cancer online at www.secondchance2life.com.

Clinic and Foundation Donations

July 1, 2010, to December 31, 2011.

*We express our appreciation to all of our friends and supporters and to the following whose donations and pledges over \$100.
We also extend deepest gratitude for the many gifts to Friends for Hope and in-kind donations that bring joy to our patients.*

Over \$100,000

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