



# CHILDHOOD CANCER AWARENESS MONTH

HONORING CHILDHOOD CANCER PATIENTS AND THEIR FAMILIES

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30th Anniversary

## DEFYING THE ODDS: A JOURNEY OF HOPE AND RESILIENCE FOR BABY MJ

by Monica Wonzer, MJ's Mom

After an ultrasound in July 2015, Monica and Mark found out they were pregnant with a baby boy, due in October. Monica had a smaller, athletic build but started experiencing high blood pressure that required medication. The medical team also diagnosed the baby with Cystic Kidney Disease (CKD or "Potter's Syndrome") which meant the baby had enlarged kidneys but no fluid. His kidneys were not producing the urine that would allow him to develop in utero. The prognosis was not good.



By the time Monica was 35 weeks pregnant, she had weekly doctor's appointments. The doctor told Monica he would do all he could to deliver a healthy baby. On August 24th, 2015, while Monica was out shopping with her mother, strong contractions started. She arrived at the hospital and after a quick and intense labor, baby MJ was born. The baby looked so fragile and the next few days would be crucial; Monica and Mark felt fortunate that the Prince of Peace Chaplain happened to be at the hospital that day to baptize MJ right after he was born. The doctors decided to place MJ on "comfort care" through hospice services and by the third day, Monica and Mark took baby MJ home.

At ten months old, MJ weighed 10 pounds and was removed from hospice care. In May 2016, MJ was admitted to Texas Children's Hospital where he was given a Gastrostomy Tube (or "G Tube") to help with his feedings. By November 2017, two-year-old MJ was on dialysis and was put on the list for a kidney transplant. He had what the doctors called a "dry run" to practice for transplant, but the kidney was not a good match. Throughout this ordeal, Monica and Mark experienced so many different emotions; one moment they were excited for MJ as he met various milestones, but simultaneously, they were sad that someone else had to be dying in order for their son to receive their kidney and live.

Finally, on May 17th, 2018, a perfect match came along! MJ went through all the transplant lab work, filled out the avalanche of necessary paperwork, and was admitted to the hospital later that day.

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# INFORMATION CENTER

## CANDLELIGHTERS CCFA

### 2023 Board of Directors

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 Chris Joseph - Secretary  
 Aron Will - Immediate Past President  
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## UPCOMING EVENTS

### CANDLELIGHTERS FUN WALK

Saturday, September 9th

### LIGHTS OF COURAGE

Thursday, October 26th

### FAMILY FALL FESTIVAL

Sunday, October 29th

### HRP GOLF TOURNAMENT

Wednesday, November 15th

### HOLIDAY ADOPT-A-FAMILY PROGRAM

September - December

### CAMP CLIFF

Friday, February 16 - Sunday, February 18, 2024

### Parent Support Group Meetings

SUPPORT GROUP MEETINGS ARE CURRENTLY VIRTUAL

### MD ANDERSON CHILDREN'S CANCER HOSPITAL & CHILDREN'S MEMORIAL HERMANN HOSPITAL

EVERY WEDNESDAY AT 11:00 AM

VIA ZOOM VIDEO CALL

TO RSVP AND GET THE CALL LINK, PLEASE EMAIL

YUVI SIFUENTES: [YSIFUENTES@CANDLE.ORG](mailto:YSIFUENTES@CANDLE.ORG)

### TEXAS CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL

EVERY WEDNESDAY AT 1:00 PM

VIA ZOOM VIDEO CALL

TO RSVP AND GET THE CALL LINK, PLEASE EMAIL

LINDA PEÑA: [LPENA@CANDLE.ORG](mailto:LPENA@CANDLE.ORG)

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 OFFICE: (713) 270-4700 | FAX: (713) 270-9802

## PARENT CONSULTANTS

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(Continued from cover) Mark, Monica, her mom, and all the extended family were there as MJ was whisked away to the operating room at 5 am the next morning. They administered medication to make him comfortable and as Monica left the room, MJ had a huge smile on his face. She thought, “what a great way to leave my son as he goes into this life-saving surgery.” She knew he was in good hands.

During the surgery, the new kidney was placed in the belly and hooked to the main artery, leaving his own kidneys intact. At one point, MJ didn't seem to be responding well, so the physician removed the kidney, placed it back in the cooler, and gave MJ a break. They almost stopped the 12-hour operation. However, as God would have it, one of the OR surgeons was also a liver specialist. He decided to take a vein from a liver in the freezer and wire it into the kidney to complete the transplant. Fast forward, and MJ was intubated for a whole month.

Then, another ‘God moment’ happened. During one of the many tests and procedures MJ went through, he received an ultrasound where they found a lump in his liver. It was the very early stage of hepatoblastoma - liver cancer. Monica says, “The kidney transplant saved MJ's life because that is when the cancer was detected.” Without the close monitoring, they may not have found the lump in time.

A month later, MJ had surgery to remove the tumor and he started chemotherapy treatments, with the last dose being administered right before Christmas of 2018. Candlelighters was there and supported MJ and his family from the moment he was diagnosed in June 2018 through today!



Candlelighters Parent Consultants met Mark and Monica right where they were: in the middle of chemo treatments and monitoring new kidney functions. Receiving parking assistance and one-on-one visits from Parent Consultants (fellow cancer moms who have been on a similar journey) was the biggest practical assistance from Candlelighters. As MJ has become more stable and as he gets closer to the end of his cancer treatment, the Griffiths family has become more involved in Candlelighters activities and events, especially Fun Walk! Each year, MJ has a team that walks in his neighborhood to help raise much needed funds for assistance for his and other cancer families, just like they have received.

MJ has gone through so much in his short life - in and out of hospitals, major surgeries, blood transfusions, needles poking him all over, and he's still such a trooper! Because the chemotherapy drugs are toxic, MJ's kidney is not doing great, but it is stable. In Monica's words, “Still rockin' stable!” MJ is now 6 years old and is a strong, sweet, happy, energetic boy who enjoys playing with his toys. And Candlelighters is thankful to have met MJ and his family along their journey!

MJ AND HIS FAMILY WILL BE PARTICIPATING IN THE FUN WALK & RAISING MONEY TO HELP OTHER CANCER FAMILIES RECEIVE ALL THE SUPPORT CANDLELIGHTERS HAS TO OFFER. TO MAKE A DONATION TO THEIR TEAM, VISIT: [GIVE.CANDLE.ORG/GOTO/TEAMMJ23](https://GIVE.CANDLE.ORG/GOTO/TEAMMJ23)



# 30 *days of honoring* CHILDHOOD CANCER AWARENESS MONTH *in September!*



## Be Aware & Know the Facts:

1. Candlelighters supports 4,902 childhood cancer families annually
2. Childhood Cancer is the #1 cause of death of children by disease
3. 80% of childhood cancer families face financial hardships
4. 43 kids in the US are diagnosed every day with a form of childhood cancer
5. 1 in 4 elementary schools has a student who has or had childhood cancer
6. The average age of a child when diagnosed with cancer is 6 years old

## Support Candlelighters Families by Collecting & Donating:

7. Grocery Gift Cards
8. Restaurant or UberEats Gift Cards
9. Gas Gift Cards
10. Target or Walmart Gift Cards
11. \$19 for one day of Hospital Parking
12. Art Supplies/DIY Activities for Patients in the Hospital
13. Travel-sized toiletries for unexpected hospital stays
14. Kindles, Fire Sticks & Amazon Gift Cards
15. Blankets, Cozy Socks, & Knit Caps

## Connect With Us & Join Us!

16. Follow us on Facebook & Instagram!
17. Host a Facebook Fundraiser in honor of Childhood Cancer Awareness Month  
<https://www.facebook.com/fund/candlelighters/>
18. Wear GOLD at your school!
19. Subscribe to our Newsletter
20. Join us at the FUN WALK on Saturday, September 9th at Terry Hershey Park!
21. FUN WALK RAFFLE - Visit link:  
[go.rallyup.com/2023fw-raffle](http://go.rallyup.com/2023fw-raffle)
22. Join our Young Professionals Group!
23. Sponsor our Camp CLIFF weekend -  
<http://tiny.cc/fundcamp>
24. Sponsor & Attend our LIGHTS OF COURAGE Event on October 26th
25. Sponsor a cancer family through our HOLIDAY ADOPT-A-FAMILY Program
26. Volunteer your time at our office

## Donate:

27. Make a Tax-Deductible Donation to Candlelighters at [www.candle.org](http://www.candle.org)
28. Double your gift through your employer's Matching Gift program
29. Your Talents: Photography, Graphic Design, Music, Kids Activities, etc.
30. Items and Unique Experiences for our Lights of Courage Raffle!



# CHARITY HORSE SHOW TREATS CANCER FAMILIES

Pin Oak Charity Horse Show & Karinda K Equine Photography Team Up



Known for its rich history, traditions, and philanthropic giving, the [Pin Oak Charity Horse Show](#) is one of the oldest and most prestigious horse shows in the country. Pin Oak has been a long-time supporter of Candlelighters and every year invites childhood cancer families to enjoy the festivities. This year, the show expanded to four themed gala nights throughout April where families were treated to complimentary seats, a delicious dinner and dessert, horse meet and greets, and an incredible show! This unique experience gives Candlelighters families the opportunity to make memories as a family.

Once again this year, the talented Karinda Kinsler offered on-site equine portrait sessions at the Pin Oak Charity Horse Show, with 100% of the proceeds benefiting Candlelighters.

The childhood cancer community is near to her and her husband Austin's hearts; at the age of 7, Austin lost his little sister Jessica to cancer. Karinda dreamed up this fundraiser to give back to an organization that supports the whole family through a childhood cancer diagnosis, and Candlelighters was the perfect fit. Thank you to [Karinda K Equine Photography](#) for your tireless efforts making this fundraiser a success!

# TEAM REJOYCE'S WEEKEND OF HOPE A SUCCESS!

Stevenson Family Hosts Washer Tournament to Raise Funds for Candlelighters

Team Rejoyce was formed by the Stevenson Family to honor those who have lost their lives to cancer, are battling cancer, and are survivors. After losing their mother, Joyce, to a hard-fought battle with cancer, they decided it was time to "fight back." [Weekend of Hope](#) started as a small fundraiser and has turned in to a 2-day, community-wide annual event in their hometown of Moulton, Texas.

The festivities started on Friday, May 5th at [Pavlas Tavern](#) with a big crowd enjoying live music by [Seldom Herd Band](#) and yummy street tacos! The next day, everyone gathered at the Moulton Park Pavilion for the weekend's hallmark 3-Hole Washer Tournament, 50/50 Raffle, Silent Auction, music, dancing, and complimentary lunch.

Supporters, friends, and family enjoyed the sunshine, washers clinking, laughter, music, and children running around and playing.

The community in Moulton and those surrounding the Stevenson family blew everyone away with their commitment to supporting Team Rejoyce and Candlelighters again this year!

In total, Team Rejoyce's 2023 Weekend of Hope raised **\$25,403** to support Candlelighters! Joyce's legacy lives on through every Candlelighters family member served through these donations.





# BREAK A CLAY FOR CANDLELIGHTERS

Aiming High for a Noble Cause

In a heartwarming display of community spirit, sponsors and supporters came together on Friday, May 12th, for Candlelighters 3rd Annual Break A Clay For Candlelighters event at the Greater Houston Sports Club. We had a sold out crowd of over 170 shooters who showcased their marksmanship skills while reveling in the thrill of healthy competition! Our talented attendees helped raise an astounding \$100,000 to fund programs and make a difference in the lives of children facing the toughest battle that is childhood cancer.

In true Houston fashion, it was hot and humid but that didn't stop us from lots of shooting, fun target games, and a delicious barbecue lunch thanks to the Planet Texas Barbeque Cook-Off Team and Ditta Meat Food Service Company. There was a competitive silent auction full of amazing packages including vacations, golf swag, goodies from local breweries, a Traeger Grill, and so much more. While eating lunch, attendees heard from Candlelighters dad, Ken Hanning, who shared his moving testimony of his son Kaleb's battle with cancer. His words resonated and reminded everyone present of the real purpose behind the day's festivities. After attendees were done shooting and the scores were being tallied, they got to enjoy cold beer and spirits thanks to Tito's Handmade Vodka, St. Arnold's Brewing Company, Karbach Brewing Co., Urban South Brewery, and PepsiCo.



Congratulations to the 2023 1st Place Team - Gerald Thomas, Ryan Meade, Colby Thomas, and Everett Kaplan! Our Mixology Game Winner was Gerald Thomas and the day's Top Shooter was Thomas Nasser! The 2nd Place Team consisted of Harold Thomas, Michael Price, Steve Starcke, and Jared Gayhart, and we had a tie for the 3rd Place Team between Best Trash Team and Sunrise Plastics. Team Francis took home the win for the Flurry competition!

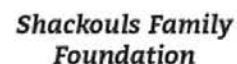
Thank you to our co-chairs Brendan Gilbert, Travis Francis, and Russell Jones, our auction donors, our volunteers, and so many others that made this event a success! Special thanks to Texas Land Professionals for being our Platinum Event Sponsor. Please Save The Date for Friday, May 10, 2024, for next year's 4th Annual Break A Clay for Candlelighters Clay Shoot Tournament and fundraiser! You will not want to miss out on this growing, fun event!



## Thank You SPONSORS



Chris Joseph









# RINGING IN TRIUMPH & HONORING MILESTONES

Candlelighters Creates Party Kits To Help Families Celebrate End-of-Treatment Victories

Childhood cancer is a journey that demands unwavering strength, resilience, and the support of loved ones and your 'village.' For families dealing with the challenges of pediatric cancer, every step forward is a triumph, and no milestone is more significant than the end of treatment. The sound of a bell ringing marks a victorious moment, signaling the completion of a challenging chapter and the beginning of a hopeful future.

At Candlelighters, we have always been committed to standing by the side of these brave families and helping them navigate the intricate path of childhood cancer. We heard from families that the pandemic really cast a shadow on the traditional bell-ringing celebrations, making it difficult for families to share their joy with the community that had supported them through thick and thin. That's why Candlelighters has been thrilled to offer Bell Ringing In A Box party kits!

These kits have been designed to enable families to host their very own bell-ringing celebrations outside of the hospital walls, surrounded by their closest loved ones. This initiative was born out of a heartfelt desire to ensure that no end-of-treatment milestone goes unrecognized, even in the face of challenging circumstances. Each triumphant moment deserves to be celebrated, and our Bell Ringing In A Box kits are here to make that possible!

Inside the kit, families will find everything they need to create a heartwarming and joyous celebration:

- Custom Name Yard Sign: a personalized sign proudly displaying your child's name, letting the world know about their remarkable achievement!
- Gold Bell: the iconic gold bell symbolizing the victorious end of treatment, ready to be joyously rung by your brave survivor!
- And SO much more: a beautifully framed certificate commemorating this significant milestone; a \$25 H-E-B Gift Card to purchase celebration sweets; gold party decorations and balloons; confetti wands to add some playful fun to the celebration; miniature bell party favors to be given as thoughtful keepsakes for attendees to remember this joyous day; and even more surprises and delights, all carefully selected to ensure that your at-home celebration is a truly memorable and heartwarming experience!

With our Bell Ringing In A Box party kits, we aim to bring you the spirit of celebration that ensures the journey from survivor to thriver is marked with the joy, love, and support that every family deserves. To our donors and Amazon Wish List Buyers who made these boxes possible, thank you for helping us make sure these victories are celebrated with the love and fanfare they deserve!





# SNAPSHOTS OF A MIRACLE

By Kimberly Rex, Mother of Lane Rex

The picture on the left pops up every year, and every year I share it on Facebook. Less than 24 hours after this exact picture was taken, Lane and I would be medevacked by airplane to Houston from Corpus Christi to begin the battle for his life.

I'm teary today. Not because I'm sad, but because I cannot believe it's been eight whole years. I am overwhelmed with gratitude. This picture is a snapshot of God's perfect protection, His mercy, and His grace. When my husband Jason and I rewind the time in our minds to the months before Lane's childhood cancer diagnosis, we remember the way the Lord prepared our hearts, our minds, and our finances - it felt like every single detail was prepared and set in place before we knew what was to come. He knew what we would face because we live in a broken world, but He prepared us and went before us. He never left us. He was there before, He was right there during the most agonizing moments, and even still today. The Lord is right in our midst the entire time. It's mind-blowing to think of where we've come!

Somedays, I still struggle with the aftermath of what childhood cancer left behind for my son and my family. Post Traumatic Stress Disorder is very real, but the Lord's tenderness meets me every time I'm struggling. Going through Lane's cancer journey was the hardest season of our lives, but we wouldn't change who our family became because of it all.

If you need to see a miracle today, here's one for you. Look at the picture on the right. This is a picture of His healing touch over and over again, His miracles. Lane battled for a long, agonizing 1,217 days. It was a long walk. But here he is! VICTORIOUS! Our very own walking, talking, breathing miracle.

Lane is compassionate, empathetic, loving, kind, helpful, sensitive, brave, hilarious, smart as a whip, and wise way beyond his 12 years. He's been through more in his short life than most of us experience in an entire lifetime, so if you're hurting, need someone to cry with you, or want to talk about life, Lane is your guy. He is also busy all the time, never sits still, is fearless, drives me bonkers, likes to prank people, is loud, rowdy, and has a big, giant personality! He was knit together in my womb so perfectly and created to be exactly who he is today... our beautiful mess! Our home and our lives would be much too quiet without our Lane. Our healthy and whole "Laner." God is able!

This year, we will celebrate 5 years since his last chemotherapy on December 8th, and on that day, he will finally, officially be declared cancer free! Five years off of treatment and moving into long-term survivorship. My words fall short, but every day for the rest of my days, I will give Him thanks and glory.





# A DAZZLING DAY OF CELEBRATING MOMS

Candlelighters Honors Mothers Standing Strong Amidst Their Children's Cancer Journeys

Candlelighters, dedicated to supporting the whole family taking on childhood cancer, orchestrated a couple of heartwarming celebrations in honor of Mother's Day. These lunch events were a delightful tribute to the strong and resilient mothers who stand alongside their children throughout their tough cancer journeys. Thanks to the unwavering support of our remarkable Parent Consultants and the gracious sponsorship from [The Molho Group Real Estate Brokerage](#), [Donna & Jack Molho](#), and [Charlie's Bar-B-Que Restaurant](#), the mothers were treated to a delicious barbeque luncheon in May. This special occasion provided not only a delectable feast, but also an opportunity for these mothers to forge meaningful connections, fostering a sense of camaraderie and understanding with other moms.

One highlight of the celebrations was revealing the yellow boxes with white bows from [Kendra Scott](#), an incredibly generous partner of Candlelighters. In a gesture that sparkled with compassion, Kendra Scott showered the mothers with a dazzling array of jewelry, including elegant earrings, necklaces, and bracelets, collectively valued at thousands of dollars! This unexpected and heartwarming surprise added a touch of glamour and joy to the day, making the mothers feel cherished and appreciated for their enduring strength and love. The event not only offered a chance for mothers to revel in each other's company, but also served as a reminder of the power of community and support during challenging times.

The success of such heartwarming outings and memory-making moments like these hinges on the dedication of Candlelighters' donors and supporters who play an integral role in ensuring that events like the Mother's Day lunches are available to bless our families at no cost. Their generosity and compassion make it possible for families facing immense challenges to find respite, joy, and a sense of togetherness. The organization extends its heartfelt gratitude to everyone who contributed to making these Mother's Day celebrations a reality!

We also hold a special place in our hearts for our childhood cancer dads! Over 75 Candlelighters dads were treated with gift cards to help celebrate Father's Day! [Happy Mother's Day and Father's Day to the strongest parents we know!](#)





# A BITTERSWEET 'SEE YOU LATER'

LeighAnna Hutchinson Honors Mom & Retired Candlelighters Parent Consultant Jaynie Hutchinson

Almost twenty-five years ago, you fought beside your seven-year-old daughter, who was fighting against all odds for her life. Little did you know, you would be called to fight alongside hundreds, if not thousands, more.

Twenty-two years ago, you listened to God’s calling and took a leap of faith when you accepted the position to become a Parent Consultant for Candlelighters. I cannot imagine what our lives would be like without Candlelighters in them. I would not have been inspired to start Walk for Kids, or met any of the amazing patients, families, and others throughout the years. And Camp CLIFF would not be the same without Dad’s famous words, "HEYYYYYYYY CAMPERS!" Twenty-two years ago, our family chose to take this leap together to help patients and families who would travel the difficult roads that we once traveled.

On your very first day, you walked into your first room to find the cutest little boy, who would quickly steal your heart, and his Mom, who would quickly become your best friend and your daughter’s "other mother." Over the past twenty-two years, you have walked into thousands of rooms and brought hope, joy, and support. In situations where others would run for fear of not knowing what to say or do, you chose to stand beside your patients and families from their happiest to their darkest days. From late-night phone calls and trips to the hospital, to weekly support group meetings, to birthday and graduation parties, to burying our angel children. You chose to stand and fight!

Mom, your retirement has arrived! Travel, spa days, family time, and so much more awaits you! Although I know you are so excited to start this new chapter, it’s hard to imagine our lives without Candlelighters or Candlelighters without you. For twenty-two years, you have served as a strong advocate, mentor, and supporter of the mission and values of Candlelighters. You have walked this journey with thousands. You brought light to some of the darkest places.

I’ll end with one of my favorite Harry Potter quotes by Albus Dumbledore: "Happiness can be found, even in the darkest of times, if one only remembers to turn on the light." Thank you for lighting the way for thousands of childhood cancer patients and their families over these past twenty-two years, Mom! Congratulations on your retirement!





# CELEBRATING GRADUATES: SENIOR SPOTLIGHTS

Honoring childhood cancer families for accomplishing such a big milestone!



Alden Duncan



Anthony Howard



Carmen Gonzalez



Carson Cocales



Carson Hill



Christian Castillo



Dennis Barrios



Eden Green



Edward Trevino III



Emiliano Segovia



Eve Brogger



Gabriela Hernandez



# CELEBRATING GRADUATES: SENIOR SPOTLIGHTS

Honoring childhood cancer families for accomplishing such a big milestone!



Jay Melendez



Jermanie Tennard



John Gulley



Jorge Pineda



Jramail Tyler II



Kaylan Jackson



Kensington Martin



Liliana Alvarez



Luciano Palacios



Maelene Ibarra



Mateo Valencia



Nadia Jones



# CELEBRATING GRADUATES: SENIOR SPOTLIGHTS

Honoring childhood cancer families for accomplishing such a big milestone!



Ryder Solberg



Sandra Reyes



Sarah Reyes



Sofia Echegollen



Trey Lucas



Trinity Pruitt



Victor Medrano



Walker Holman



Weston Swoboda

Candlelighters was thrilled to continue our efforts to honor graduating seniors this year! Along with our social media campaign to spotlight all of their great accomplishments and future plans, with the help of sponsor **GEODIS**, we also honored 34 seniors with \$75 Target Gift Cards! Congratulations to the Graduating Class of 2023!





# AN EVENING OF ELEGANCE AND APPRECIATION

## Candlelighters Thanks Top Donors at Steak 48 Reception

Candlelighters invited top supporters for a special evening where we could honor their generosity, deepen relationships, and celebrate the power of giving. Our attendees' unwavering support for the childhood cancer community deserved to be celebrated and above all else, thanked. This evening was even more meaningful because donors could enjoy the night knowing the event was courtesy of Steak 48, and no fundraising dollars were used to host this event.

Steak 48 pulled out all the stops with curated culinary delights, wine, champagne, and cocktails, all generously donated and served in their dazzling private dining room. For the past couple years, Steak 48 has also served Candlelighters families by inviting them to celebrate special milestones with a complimentary meal at their restaurant. This gesture has meant the world to families who have attended these dinners, and the staff at Steak 48 has gone above and beyond to make each and every Candlelighters family member feel honored and supported.

A highlight of the evening was the opportunity to showcase the remarkable impact our donors have had on local childhood cancer families like the Raish Family. Brooke Raish took to the podium and shared her daughter Posey's story of resilience and hope, illustrating the direct and positive influence that each donor has had on the lives of those in need. We honored our founder, Mary Helmreich, who was blown away by the growth this organization has had over the years. We also said a tearful "farewell" to long-time Parent Consultant, Jaynie, who dedicated 22 years to helping other families on their cancer journey. These narratives served as a poignant reminder of the transformative power of our donors contributions.

The reception not only celebrated past achievements, but also served as a platform for nurturing ongoing partnerships. Attendees engaged in conversations that centered around future endeavors, and exploring avenues for even greater collaboration to uplift local childhood cancer families and amplify our collective impact. Thank you to all who joined us and who have supported us over the years!





# SUMMER SURPRISES: A FAMILY FIESTA

## Annual Party Brings Surprises, Gifts Galore, and Heartwarming Connections

Amidst the sweltering summer heat, a vibrant and heartwarming family event took center stage at the Branches building of [St. Luke's United Methodist Church](#). The atmosphere was electric as Parent Consultants welcomed families with open arms, setting the tone for a time of joy, connection, and fun!

As families walked through the balloon-adorned entry, they made their way past an interactive [Sugar Land Space Cowboys](#) booth and into a full-blown party! DJ Jeffrey was spinning all the summer's catchy tunes and hosting fun minute-to-win-it games. Kiddos could line up for spectacular face painting after meeting the likes of Spiderman and surprise visitor, [Orion](#), the Sugar Land Space Cowboys' friendly mascot! Families could stop by a craft table to make their own lei necklaces, or take a few minutes to design and paint their very own tile for a special Candlelighters project. Friends of Candlelighters, [Ascend Performance Materials](#), brought the neatest STEM activity boxes and helped attendees assemble wooden motorized helicopters, fans, and cars! Thanks to local photo booth provider, [FotoPop](#), who donated their services in full for the get-together, partygoers were able to capture fun snapshots that will last them a lifetime! [That Balloon Girl](#) provided a showstopping balloon garland, perfectly setting the tone for the brightest and most fun summer party!

The giveaways for the day were overflowing! Families could grab drawstring backpacks filled with goodies, custom Candlelighters blankets, model cars, and each child got to pair up with a volunteer from [Adam's Angels Ministries](#) to choose their favorite gift from the toy area! The incredibly generous team from [Kendra Scott](#) also brought their Kendra Cares Mobile Color Bar and provided the opportunity for attendees (both kids and adults!) to create their own custom jewelry with their favorite color gemstones. Once it was time to go, families visited the [Oler Relocation](#) table to grab their Chick-fil-A lunches and their family's cookie kits, packed full of sprinkles and icing for some at-home fun.

For those willing to brave the heat, families could venture outside to play some lawn games, have a meet and greet with horses from [SIRE Therapeutic Horsemanship](#), enjoy a refreshing popsicle courtesy of [Frio's Gourmet Popsicles](#), and take a tour of the [ABC13 Weather Storm Chaser Truck](#)! Some even got to practice their news anchor skills!

It was an honor to carry on our mission of supporting cancer families with this event. Thank you to our incredible sponsors, volunteers, and vendors who made the day exceptional. Special thank you to our host, [St. Luke's United Methodist Church](#) and the [Branches](#) team, and our presenting sponsors [Adam's Angels Ministries](#), [GEODIS](#), and [OlerRelo](#)! Thank you to our incredible in-kind sponsors, [ABC13](#), [Ascend Performance Materials](#), [Causeplay Alliance Project](#), [DJ Jeffrey](#), [Fairest of All Parties](#), [FotoPop Photo Booth](#), [Frio's Gourmet Pops](#), [Kendra Scott](#), and [That Balloon Girl](#). And thank you to all the volunteers from [Adam's Angels](#), [Ascend Performance Materials](#), [Audrey Rogan](#), [Becca Fisher](#), [Brandon De Hoyos](#), [Christina Kratky](#), [Haley Benefield](#), [Jodi & Art Vasquez](#), [Katie Wendt](#), [Kira Linares](#) (\*long-term childhood cancer survivor), [Lewis Ehrle](#), [Mary Linares](#) (\*childhood cancer mom), [Mary Schuler](#), [Morgan Wheeler](#), [National Charity League Memorial Chapter](#), [OlerRelo](#), [St. Luke's United Methodist Senior Outreach Group](#), [The Wong Family](#), [Thompson Custom Homes](#), [Tina Kratky](#), and [Tracey Rogan](#) for helping us celebrate our childhood cancer families and bring them a day of fun away from treatment. Without our sponsors and volunteers, these events wouldn't be possible!









# SUMMER SURPRISES: A FAMILY FIESTA

Annual Party Brings Surprises, Gifts Galore, and Heartwarming Connections



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THANK YOU SPONSORS





# CANDLELIGHTERS WELCOMES NEW OFFICE STAFF

Hannah Belk, Special Events Manager

Hannah recently moved to Houston after graduating Summa Cum Laude from Iowa State University with a Major in Communication Studies and Minors in Event Management and Leadership Studies. Her involvement with the Nonprofit Protégé Program, Dance Marathon – a pediatric cancer support organization, and her sorority as the Community Service Director, has given Hannah a lot of exposure to the nonprofit industry.

Hannah has always been devoted to advocating for children's health ever since her cousin, Alex, was diagnosed with Acute Lymphoblastic Leukemia (ALL) in 2009. Hannah told us, "After graduating college, I knew I wanted to continue this passion, so when the opportunity with Candlelighters came up, I felt it was meant to be!"

Away from work, Hannah enjoys spending time outdoors, staying active, being involved with her church, and chatting on the phone with long-distance family and friends.



# FELLOW CANCER MOM STEPS INTO A NEW ROLE

Jennifer Funderburk, Parent Consultant

Please welcome the newest addition to the Candlelighters team, Jennifer Funderburk! Jennifer has taken on the role of Parent Consultant to MD Anderson Children's Cancer Hospital patients and families.



A native Houstonian, Jennifer has been married to her wonderfully supportive husband, Jason, for over 17 years. Their 16-year-old son, Jackson, is an avid rock-climber and Acute Lymphoblastic Leukemia (ALL) survivor. Jennifer was a stay-at-home mom when Jackson was diagnosed at the age of two; once he completed treatment, she made the decision to continue to be a stay-at-home parent. Now that Jackson is older, Jennifer felt it was time to find a new role to take on. Wanting to do something fulfilling and impactful, she found it fortuitous when the news arrived in her inbox that Candlelighters was looking for a new Parent Consultant.

Jennifer is most looking forward to connecting with families and helping them overcome some of the needs and challenges presented by a childhood cancer diagnosis. Outside of her new role at Candlelighters, Jennifer spends time gardening, practicing and studying yoga, and driving Jackson to his many rock-climbing competitions and excursions.



*Thank You to This Year's Sponsors!*

# CANDLELIGHTERS CARES 2023



FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT CANDLELIGHTERS CARES AND BECOMING A SPONSOR, PLEASE CONTACT PROGRAM DIRECTOR CARLY BRADSHAW AT [CBRADSHAW@CANDLE.ORG](mailto:CBRADSHAW@CANDLE.ORG).





# CELEBRATING OUR HOSPITAL PARTNERS

## Honoring Our Childhood Cancer Caretaker Village

The proverbial phrase, "It takes a village," resonates profoundly, especially within the context of childhood cancer and the web of care that envelops patients and their families. This spring, Candlelighters took time to recognize and appreciate the dedicated professionals within our partner hospitals who work together to treat our families in the childhood cancer community. This recognition extended to the empathetic social workers, the beloved child life specialists, the committed doctors, and the nurturing nurses who wholeheartedly invest themselves daily in the well-being of our families.

Across the months of March, April, and May, a heartfelt gesture of appreciation unfurled as the hospital staff received Candlelighters t-shirts, symbolic of a warm embrace. This tangible reminder reassures them that just as they provide solace and care to their young patients, they too have our support! Acknowledging the dedication of the remarkable doctors who devote boundless hours to tending to our families, we provided a delicious breakfast to replenish their spirits and their energy! Candlelighters also treated the hospital's devoted social workers and child life specialists through thoughtful tokens of appreciation and genuine thanks. The collective contributions of these professionals form a vital core of the Candlelighters community, significantly enhancing the lives they touch. To all these dedicated individuals, we extend our deep gratitude and heartfelt thanks! We are honored to be your partners!





# 2023 FUN WALK | SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 9

Taking 4,837 Steps For Childhood Cancer Families



WALK with us at TERRY HERSHEY PARK (or wherever you are) on Saturday, September 9! Participating in this year's Fun Walk means you are raising vital awareness and funds for childhood cancer families!

- Register to participate in the Fun Walk for FREE: <http://give.candle.org/2023FunWalk>
- Take the pledge to Walk 4,837 Steps on Walk Day (about 2 miles) - **one step for each of our Candlelighters Families!**
- Help by sharing the Candlelighters mission AND fundraising efforts via social media and emails to friends and family!
- Purchase tickets to win prizes from our online raffle: <https://go.rallyup.com/2023fw-raffle>

Our goal is to raise \$260,000 this year and **we can't do it without YOU!** Funds raised will go toward daily support, programs, and services for childhood cancer families. **CANCER DOESN'T STOP** and neither will we! We know you will help us and we can't wait to see what we will accomplish together!

## THANK YOU TO OUR 2023 SPONSORS



CARRIE & BEN  
PISKLAK



JAMES A. ULLRICH  
J.D., C.P.A.





# 2023 FUN WALK FUNDRAISING TIPS & IDEAS



## ONLINE FUNDRAISING TIPS

1. Register online at <http://give.candle.org/2023FunWalk>
2. Once registered, utilize the Participant Center to:
  - a. **Personalize your Page** - so your friends and family know WHY you're walking and WHAT their donation will go towards
  - b. **Email friends and family** - upload contacts and use the email templates to ask for donations AND thank your friends and family who donate
  - c. **Connect to Facebook** - at the top of your Participant Center Homepage, look for the "Connect to Facebook" button - this enables the Fun Walk site and Facebook to link, making it easier to receive donations from Facebook friends! \*Facebook fundraisers are 100% safe AND we get 100% of the donation, no fees!
3. Make specific asks: 19th day of the month ask for \$19 to pay for one day of hospital parking, 5-year cancer survivor ask for \$50, etc.
4. Studies show it takes on average 3-7 "asks" for someone to donate - you're not being annoying, don't worry!

## UNIQUE FUNDRAISING IDEAS & ACTIVITIES

1. **Share your Story**: the most effective way to fundraise in 2023 via social media and email is simple: Share Your Story - write a heartfelt letter, film an honest video, share with your friends and family that CANCER HASN'T STOPPED and you're doing something about it!
2. **Post-it Palooza**: write out numbers 1-50 on post-its and take a picture - ask your friends and family to claim a number to donate, your challenge is to have them all claimed!
3. **Fundraising Challenges**: have a friendly competition between the members of your walk team or a fellow walk team!
4. **Online BINGO**: host a virtual game night and ask friends and family to make a donation to play. Don't forget to have a few small prizes along the way! Check online for free templates!

## FUNDRAISING AWARDS

Rookie of the Year - Top Fundraising First-Year Walk Teams

- Community
- Corporate
- Family

Top Fundraising Teams

- Top 2 Community Teams
- Top 4 Corporate Teams
- Top 10 Family Teams

Top Facebook Fundraisers

- Community Walker
- Corporate Walker
- Family Walker

## SPECIALTY AWARDS

Best Team Name

Best Walking Location

Best Team T-Shirts

- Corporate
- Family
- Community

Awards are given out on walk day and are based on fundraising totals from Friday, September 8th at NOON.

Fun Walk Questions? please contact Kelsey Tarpinian at [kelseytc@candle.org](mailto:kelseytc@candle.org)



# 30 YEARS OF WALKING ALONGSIDE FAMILIES

The History of the Parent Consultant Program & Candlelighters in Houston

In 1975, the Parent Consultant position came into being at Rhode Island Hospital in Providence, Rhode Island, through the efforts of an energetic Candlelighters parent, Eugenia Wild. In 1985 and 1986, The Parent Consultant Role in Pediatric Oncology was published by authors Paul Pitel, MD, Ann Pitel, Helena Richards, Joy Benson, and Edward Forman, MD, in two separate publications - the Children's Healthcare Journal (1985) and The Candlelighters Childhood Cancer Foundation Progress Reports. By 1986, more than twelve treatment centers staffed Parent Consultants, including one hospital in Johannesburg, South Africa. Parent advocate programs around the country and the world were creating valuable support for families facing childhood cancer. And in Houston, there was a need for support like this.

Candlelighters kicked off in Houston in 1989 with two parent support groups in the Texas Medical Center: one at Texas Children's Cancer Center and one at The Children's Cancer Hospital at MD Anderson Cancer Center. The parent group at Texas Children's Cancer Center sought formal incorporation, and in 1993, Candlelighters Childhood Cancer Family Alliance was legally formed. In the fall of 1993, they invited the parent group from The Children's Cancer Hospital at MD Anderson Cancer Center to join them and the two organizations merged into one.

The founding families' first plan of action was to develop a program to connect families of children with cancer to provide the kind of support they wished they had while their children were on active treatment. Thus, the Parent Consultant Program was born and here to stay! Since 1993, Candlelighters Parent Consultants (parents of children with cancer) have been providing daily support to families of children receiving treatment at Texas Children's Hospital and MD Anderson Cancer Center Hospital in the Texas Medical Center. Since then, we have grown from two Parent Consultants to five, and have extended our outreach efforts to families receiving treatment at Children's Memorial Hermann, Texas Children's Hospital West in Katy, and Texas Children's Hospital in The Woodlands. This year, we celebrate 30 years of walking alongside our childhood cancer families!



Parent Support Group Meeting with Mary Helmreich & Parent Consultant Roseanna Daly



Volunteer-Turned-Board Member Linda Evans helps paint faces at Candlelighters event



Mary Helmreich with one of Candlelighters' First Parent Consultants, Connie Bolin



A Look Back at Old Versions of the Candlelighters Logo



Parent Consultants Jaynie Hutchinson & Carol Benefield



Founder, Mary Helmreich at our 1st Family Camp



# JOIN US AT LIGHTS OF COURAGE

An Evening Honoring Inspiring Candlelighters Families

Come and join us at the Candlelighters Lights of Courage event, where we celebrate children with cancer and their families. This year, we are commemorating our 30th Anniversary and honoring four families who have been a beacon of hope within the childhood cancer community.

Along with **Event Chairs Katie & Bobby Stanton and Maggie & Rob Vermillion**, we are looking forward to hosting our guests, sponsors, and honorees at the beautiful **Houston Polo Club** in October! This gorgeous outdoor venue provides a beautiful backdrop where we can come together and raise much-needed funding to continue serving children with cancer and their families. We will have pre-event signature cocktails thanks to **Tito's Handmade Vodka** and **Maker's Mark Whiskey**, lawn games, a custom hat bar, an exhibition polo match, and a raffle boasting great packages from local businesses. This year's dinner will be served by our great friends from **Masraff's** and will be followed by our amazing Live Auction featuring:

- 1-week stay in a beautiful private home in colorful **San Miguel de Allende in Mexico**
- Enjoy a long weekend in a luxury, 3-bedroom private condo in Snow Cloud in **Bachelor Gulch, Colorado**
- 4-night stay at **Estancia Chischaca in Argentina** with 5-star lodging for four hunters, hunting on thousands of acres of prime Argentine ranchlands and farmland for up to 10 plus species of Big Game animals
- A custom 14k white gold and sapphire baguette necklace designed by families of children with cancer in collaboration with **Jianna Jewelers**.
- with more added to the auction & raffle every day!

The shining feature of the night will be honoring four courageous childhood cancer families and sharing their journeys with our guests. Every year, Lights of Courage attendees are inspired by stories of courage, strength, and hope, represented by each of our honorees. Their experiences represent the thousands of children facing childhood cancer in the Houston area alone. We can't wait to introduce them to you!

## RESERVE YOUR TABLE TODAY!

Visit [givergy.us/lightsofcourage2023](http://givergy.us/lightsofcourage2023) for more information about Lights of Courage, to sponsor this event, and to reserve your table!

## Lights of Courage

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 26, 2023 at 5:30 PM

HOUSTON POLO CLUB

8552 MEMORIAL DRIVE, HOUSTON, TEXAS 77024

EVENT CHAIRS:

KATIE & BOBBY STANTON  
MAGGIE & ROB VERMILLION



COCKTAILS + LAWN GAMES

EXHIBITION POLO MATCH

DINNER

LIVE AUCTION + RAFFLE

EMCEE:

MELISSA WILSON  
FOX26 News & Candlelighters Mom

HONOREES:

ON TREATMENT HONOREE: Katia Ajoku  
IN LOVING MEMORY HONOREE: Nathaniel Foster  
LONG TERM SURVIVOR HONOREE: Eric Helmreich  
SIBLING HONOREES: The Montemayor Family

ATTIRE:

TEXAS POLO CHIC  
*Wear your favorite boots, wedges, or flats!*



## *Save The Dates!*

### **2023 FUN WALK**

TERRY HERSHEY PARK

[GIVE.CANDLE.ORG/2023FUNWALK](https://GIVE.CANDLE.ORG/2023FUNWALK)

**SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 9, 2023**

### **LIGHTS OF COURAGE**

EVENING FUNDRAISER @ HOUSTON POLO CLUB

[US.GIVERGY.COM/LIGHTSOFCOURAGE2023](https://US.GIVERGY.COM/LIGHTSOFCOURAGE2023)

**THURSDAY, OCTOBER 26, 2023**

### **FAMILY FALL FESTIVAL**

FREE FAMILY EVENT @ ST. JOHN'S SCHOOL | FAMILIES MUST RSVP!

**SUNDAY, OCTOBER 29, 2023**

### **HRP GOLF TOURNAMENT BENEFITING CANDLELIGHTERS**

WILDCAT GOLF CLUB | REGISTRATION THROUGH HRP

[HOUSTONRELOPROS.ORG/GOLF](https://HOUSTONRELOPROS.ORG/GOLF)

**WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 15, 2023**

### **HOLIDAY ADOPT-A-FAMILY PROGRAM**

SPONSORS & COMMUNITY GROUPS BUY GIFTS FOR CANDLELIGHTERS FAMILIES

**ACCEPTING FAMILY & SPONSOR APPLICATIONS IN SEPTEMBER**

### **CAMP CLIFF FAMILY CAMP WEEKEND**

FREE FAMILY EVENT | REGISTRATION OPEN FOR ELIGIBLE FAMILIES IN SEPTEMBER

**FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 16, 2024 - SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 18, 2024**



# RESOURCES FOR CANDLELIGHTERS FAMILIES

Candlelighters mission is to provide emotional, educational, and practical support to children with cancer and their families. If you are a family battling, recovering or bereaving from childhood cancer, or know a family on this journey, please share these resources both Candlelighters and other organizations in our community offer.

## CANDLELIGHTERS PROVIDES PRACTICAL SUPPORT IN THE FOLLOWING WAYS:

- Parking assistance at the Texas Medical Center
- Grocery store gift cards
- Meal passes to Texas Medical Center cafeterias
- Gas Cards
- Help with funeral expenses

## CANDLELIGHTERS PROVIDES EMOTIONAL & EDUCATIONAL SUPPORT THROUGH OUR FOLLOWING PROGRAMS AND EVENTS:

- One-on-one peer support from Parent Consultants (2 staff at MD Anderson Children's Cancer Hospital and Children's Memorial Hermann; 2 at Texas Children's Cancer Center)
- Support Group Meetings (happening Wednesday via Zoom - 1 for MDACCH/CMH families & 1 for TCH families)
- Newsletter
- Camp CLIFF (Children Loved in Families Forever) Weekend Family Camp
- Fall Family Festival
- Holiday Adopt-A-Family Program
- A Night at the Ballpark with the Sugar Land Space Cowboys, Triple-A Affiliate of the Houston Astros
- Many others throughout the year! Stay up-to-date on programs and events by joining our email list: <https://candle.org/subscribe-to-candlelighters> and newsletter mailing list, and by following us on **Facebook**: [Candlelighters Houston](#) and **Instagram**: [@candlelighters\\_houston](#)

## OTHER RESOURCES AVAILABLE TO FAMILIES FACING CHILDHOOD CANCER:

### College Scholarships

- Addi's Faith Foundation
- American Cancer Society
- Cancer for College
- Cancer Survivor Fund
- Childhood Brain Tumor Foundation/Brittany Truitt Scholarship
- Friends of Scott
- Houston Relocation Professionals
- Jack's Ride Scholarship Program
- Kidsrstrong2
- Kids 4 Kids with Cancer
- National Children's Cancer Society
- National Collegiate Cancer Foundation
- Northwestern Mutual – Sibling Scholarship Program
- The Simon Cancer Foundation Scholarship Program
- Snowdrop Foundation
- The Pediatric Brain Tumor Foundation
- The SAMFund for Young Adult Survivors of Cancer
- The Ulman Cancer Fund for Young Adults

### On-Treatment Housing

- A Shelter for Cancer Families
- Chance for Hope
- Dan's House of Hope
- Halo House Foundation
- Joe's House
- Project Joy and Hope
- Ronald McDonald House
- The Ballard House

### Transportation Assistance for People with Disabilities

- Houston Children's Charity
- Houston Ground Angels


### Grief Support

- Bo's Place
- Project Joy and Hope

### Financial Assistance

- Heroes for Children Rent and Mortgage
- Houston Children's Charity Prosthetics
- Project Joy and Hope
- The Brent Event





## September is Childhood Cancer Awareness Month

**8 children** are diagnosed with cancer every day in Houston, Texas

**229 patients** treated every day at MD Anderson Children's Cancer Hospital, Texas Children's Hospital, and Children's Memorial Hermann Hospital

**238,000 family members** receiving direct services from the Candlelighters Parent Consultants in our partner hospitals every year

PARTNER WITH CANDLELIGHTERS TODAY TO MAKE A LASTING, MEANINGFUL IMPACT ON FAMILIES WHO HAVE BEEN TOUCHED BY CHILDHOOD CANCER.



CANDLELIGHTERS CHILDHOOD CANCER FAMILY ALLIANCE'S MISSION IS TO PROVIDE EMOTIONAL, EDUCATIONAL, AND PRACTICAL SUPPORT TO CHILDREN WITH CANCER AND THEIR FAMILIES.

Candlelighters began in 1989 with two parent support groups from the Texas Medical Center: one at Texas Children's Cancer Center and one at MD Anderson Children's Cancer Hospital. The parent group at Texas Children's Cancer Center sought formal incorporation, and in 1993 Candlelighters was legally formed. In the fall of 1993, they invited the parent group from the MD Anderson Children's Cancer Hospital to join them and the two organizations merged into one. 30 years later, we've added Children's Memorial Hermann to our partner hospital list, along with local Texas Children's Hospital satellite locations. The Parent Consultant Program was developed to directly meet the needs of families at the treatment centers and to inform them of potential resources. Our programs and services extend beyond the hospital walls with our Family Camp, Adopt-A-Family, Fall Festival, Candlelighters Newsletter, and other special events. Over the years, we have learned how critically valuable it is for our Parent Consultants to be able to directly impact families through emotional support, parking assistance, meal passes, gas cards, and more. It is our greatest honor and privilege to bring this type of comfort and hope to childhood cancer families.