



More than \$200,000 raised to fight children's cancer

By EMILY LESLIE
NEWS-PRESS CORRESPONDENT

In the face of a devastating disease, there is a glimmer of hope. A teary-eyed mother stood before the audience at the Teddy Bear Cancer Foundation's Gold Ribbon Luncheon fundraising event Thursday to tell the story of how her son beat leukemia with the help and support of the foundation.

"This is something that we never imagined we'd have to be standing here in front of you to share our story," Noemi Duran said, standing next to her husband, Fred Duran, and their son, Eli.

"My son was not acting himself. He's always been really smiley and really active, as you can tell," Mrs. Duran said with a laugh, as Eli danced around the stage next to her. "He started sleeping a lot ... it was like extreme flu-like symptoms."

The family, from Ventura County, was living in Texas when Eli was diagnosed with leukemia. They decided to move back to California and were connected with the Teddy Bear Cancer Foundation.

"Upon moving here, we literally gave up everything. We didn't have any work," Mrs. Duran said. "We came home, and the Teddy Bear

Cancer Foundation helped us and supported us to be able to get back on our feet, to be standing here today and to let you know that Eli is in remission."

The average cost of a child's cancer treatment is \$20,000 per year, not to mention the income families lose when parents need to take time from work to support their young one, said Lindsey Leonard, executive director of the Teddy Bear Cancer Foundation.

The foundation financially and emotionally supports families of children with cancer until the family receives the good news that the child is healthy.

The Mireles family received the Pay It Forward Award and members spoke of the experience when daughter Isa was diagnosed with leukemia at age 2.

"I don't really remember anything, but I do remember just not really realizing that I had cancer and how much pain my family was going through," Isa, now 10 years old and cancer-free, told the News-Press. In addition to helping the Mireles family financially, the foundation considered the small things.

"Teddy Bear gave me Christmas presents," she said. "And because I please see **FUNDRAISER** on A8



Eli Duran thanks the crowd with his mother, Noemi, and father, Fred, during Thursday's Gold Ribbon Luncheon at the Coral Casino.



KENNETH SONG / NEWS-PRESS

The Mireles family accepts the Pay It Forward Award. From left are Jessica Mireles; Isa Mireles, who was diagnosed with leukemia at 2 years old; Nora Mireles; Nino Mireles; and Rene Mireles.

Comedian Dennis Miller honored at luncheon

■ FUNDRAISER

Continued from Page A1

was so sick and I couldn't go Easter hunting for eggs, they brought a bunch of candy for me."

Isa's family now returns the favor by helping other families, bringing gifts and emotional support to the hospitals where they are receiving care.

"What we learned from Teddy Bear is that what you do, is you show up," Isa's mother, Jessica, said while receiving the award. "When you show up, it means a lot to people going through this."

Isa's older brother, Nino, started a project called "Murals of Hope." Being an artist, he painted murals in the bedrooms of ailing children to cheer them up during their che-

motherapy treatments.

Other supporters honored at the luncheon were Dennis Miller, the renowned comedian and actor, who received the Heart of Gold Award for his commitment to the foundation over the last decade.

Wells Hughes was honored with the Humanitarian Award and Sheela Hunt received the Helping Hands Award.

The fundraising event, including silent and live auctions as well as a raffle, raised more than \$200,000 to help the foundation reach its overall September goal of \$250,000.

Earl Minnis, whose son is a cancer survivor, donated \$100,000 during the luncheon on behalf of himself and his wife, Claudia.

email: eslie@newspress.com