

On the Town

Teddy Bear luncheon aids cancer families

As children, we thought of our teddy bear as a trusted companion to help us through times of trouble and to comfort us through our childhood "owies."

And, as it turns out, Teddy Bear is still there for families: particularly for mommies and daddies of children with cancer.

The Teddy Bear Cancer Foundation was created 14 years ago to assist families in the tricounties area dealing with pediatric cancer by providing financial, educational and emotional support. The Teddy Bear Cancer Foundation is a godsend in assisting already-stressed families with non-medical, out-of-pocket expenditures such as special testing, gasoline and lodging. Unlike medical bills, such costs must be paid immediately and are rarely reimbursed.

This is why Teddy Bear's annual luncheon at the Coral Casino was joyfully embraced by the community to raise funds for this incredibly compassionate organization — from the thoughtful founder, **Nikki Katz**, to major sponsors **Earl and Claudia Minnis**, **Claudia Lash**, and **Jeff and Margo Barbakow**, to board chairwoman **Donna Barranco Fisher**, to directors **Bibi Moezzi**, **Rich Schuette** and **David Edelman**, to Teddy Bear families like **Misty Blake** with **Annie** to **Jessica Gonzalez** with daughter **Madeline**.

Jessica related to me that Teddy Bear Cancer Foundation assisted with specialized neuro-testing (to assess effects after chemotherapy), which insurance did not cover and she could not afford. "These were important things that people don't know about," Jessica explained, "because these are aftercare services that are needed by the

family."

Three "teen-angels" were recognized for their significant fundraising efforts: cancer survivor **Wyatt Taylor**, 15, and **Paloma Angel**, 17, and **Talia Gerstenfeld**, 13, who separately raised funds in honor of their friends with cancer.

Presentations were made to several honorees: **Kat and Jonathan Krasnoff**, who continue to help Teddy Bear long after the loss of their little girl, **Lexi**, received the Pay It Forward Award. The ever-enterprising volunteer **Pati Kern** was the Helping Hands honoree, and Cottage Children's Medical Center received the Humanitarian Award for its incredible, supportive medical teamwork.

Shaun and Carla Tomson, whose son, **Mathew**, passed away in 2006, received the Heart of Gold Award for their support. Carla said, "Nine years ago at the Teddy Bear luncheon, I was so impressed. I saw I could turn my own grief into something good for others."

Lacy Taylor, whose son, **Wyatt**, was diagnosed in 2009, brought home the mission of Teddy Bear Cancer Foundation, "No family is prepared. Even with great insurance, there is a loss of income when you quit your job to help your child. There are tutoring expenses to get your kid back into school, and counseling for the children's social and educational relationships. We hated accepting charity, but we desperately needed it at that time."

Executive Director **Lindsey Leonard** concluded, "Childhood cancer is an isolating and exhausting experience for families. We want to supply moral and financial support to help them navigate and enable them to move forward with their lives."



Erin Graffy



ERIN GRAFFY / NEWS-PRESS PHOTO

Jonathan and Kat Krasnoff, with their daughter, **Jackie**, were honored with the Pay It Forward Award from the Teddy Bear Cancer Foundation. After the passing of their daughter **Lexi**, the family came back to the foundation that assisted them, becoming supporters and sponsors of other Teddy Bear families who are in treatment.