

Two Timonium Optimists Inspired the OI Childhood Cancer Campaign

The idea for the Childhood Cancer Campaign was born in the Timonium Optimist Club!

Our members Bill and Linda Leizear became aware through their connections at Johns Hopkins Hospital that needs of families of seriously ill children who were undergoing long-term care at the JHH Sidney Kimmel Cancer Center were not being met by any source, within or outside the hospital.

They learned that parents, especially mothers, often spend weeks and months by the bedsides of sick children with rarely a break. Time alone or with other family members is a precious commodity. Families from out of town are often challenged to find safe, convenient and affordable housing near the hospital. Transportation into town or around town can be a problem. Sometimes grocery money is scarce under the added burden of costly medical care.

As the social work department at JHH made the Leizears aware of families with particular problems, Bill came to the Timonium Optimist Club to ask for help in solving them. Solutions came in the form of favors from club volunteers, cash contributions from the club and solicitation of free goods and services such as hotel rooms, food store gift certificates and spa services from metropolitan businesses. For example, volunteers met families at the airport. Sometimes whole families were accommodated in hotel rooms at no charge. Weary mothers felt refreshed after a relaxing massage, manicure and pedicure.

Interest in helping spread to other Optimist Clubs in the area and around the state. And so the work of helping children with cancer and their families grew into a Maryland-South Delaware District-wide effort and then into a major focus of Optimist International.

The Timonium Club provided leadership for the formation of an MDSD District Childhood Cancer Campaign Board to coordinate Optimist efforts. Bill and Linda Leizear and several other Timonium Optimists served on the first board with Bill as its chairman and Club Treasurer Jack Zabbara as its first treasurer. CCC money was funneled through the Timonium Club's 501(c)(3) foundation until the district's Childhood Cancer Campaign established itself as its own non-profit organization. Now that the MDSD CCC functions independently within the district, several Timonium Optimists still serve on its board. Bill and Linda Leizear play a lesser role on the board and focus their attention on being the point-of-contact with the staff at the JHH Sidney Kimmel Cancer Center to keep the Timonium Club and the whole district aware of developing needs of families.

The Sidney Kimmel Cancer Center is a treatment facility but also an important research facility that is on the verge of a significant breakthrough in curing the kind of leukemia that is one of the most deadly for children. A cure for it would have positive ramifications for other kinds of childhood and adult cancers as well. Bill Leizear and other Optimists from the Maryland-South Delaware District championed the work going on at Sidney Kimmel with Optimist International. The ultimate result was the commitment by OI to provide \$920,000 in funding over a five-year period to support a research fellow working on a cure. Now Optimist Clubs around the globe are raising money to meet the OI pledge and working on childhood cancer awareness in their own communities.