

ST. JUDE

inspire



WINTER 2022 • SPECIAL EDITION

THE  
PURPOSE  
THAT  
UNITES  
US

CELEBRATING  
60 YEARS  
OF ST. JUDE





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# ST. JUDE inspire

VOL. 4 • ISSUE 1

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**W**hen I look back on the 60-year history of St. Jude Children's Research Hospital, on all the life-saving, world-changing breakthroughs we've seen, I sometimes wonder:

What would our founder say?

The single, star-shaped building Danny Thomas dedicated on Feb. 4, 1962, has grown into an 88-acre campus where science is advanced by some of the brightest minds from around the world, fueled by the support not just of donors and volunteers, but also our patients and their families from across the globe.

I think of what St. Jude has become, 60 years on, and I suddenly realize what Danny would say. He'd say we're doing it just as he intended.

Together.

We're united by a purpose. To find cures. To save lives. To create a world where no child dies in the dawn of life.

This issue of *Inspire* celebrates the sense of purpose coursing through these United States and far beyond. You'll meet patients and their families, so grateful for the hope and healing

they found at St. Jude that they joined the cause, telling their stories to raise funds and awareness. You'll meet supporters who may never set foot on campus, or see their lives touched by pediatric cancer, but who are moved to help by their good hearts and empathetic souls. You'll meet people who walk, run and ride for St. Jude. People who take to the radio airwaves and social media and community gathering spots for St. Jude.

None of which would surprise Danny Thomas, who said he'd rather have a million people give a dollar than one person give a million. Danny wasn't just a dreamer. He was a man with a sense of purpose as big as his heart. It unites us, still.

**Richard C. Shadyac Jr.**  
President and Chief Executive Officer, ALSAC  
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# SPOTLIGHTING 60 YEARS OF ST. JUDE AROUND THE COUNTRY



St. Jude Children's Research Hospital opened its doors in Memphis on Feb. 4, 1962. That day, 60 years ago, was the culmination of a dream of entertainer Danny Thomas, who envisioned a place where children with cancer and other deadly diseases would be treated regardless of race, color, creed or their family's ability to pay. In this edition of *Inspire*, we celebrate the 60th anniversary of St. Jude by highlighting people united by the mission from coast to coast and everywhere in between.



## About the Cover:

This photo mosaic combines 1,040 images of current patients and survivors of childhood cancer and other diseases, doctors, researchers, staff, volunteers, donors and supporters to create the image of St. Jude Thaddeus, the patron saint of hopeless causes and the namesake of St. Jude Children's Research Hospital. Separately, each image reveals a unique individual, but together, they represent all of us, united in one mission, bound together for one cause: to help end childhood cancer. This incredible piece is the work of award-winning visual designer Charis Tsevis.



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## Annual Celebration

Joy Cone Co. in Pennsylvania celebrated its 100th birthday with a \$100,000 donation to St. Jude – and they’ve been giving ever since.



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Some people like the Velasquez family stay in Tennessee to give back to St. Jude and the city where they were healed.



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St. Jude patient Brody made his corner of the world a better, kinder, more caring place and inspired a town in Texas.



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From the pocket change given to Danny Thomas by a little boy in Washington in 1959 to those who today give through social media-driven campaigns, those who give to the kids of St. Jude are all connected at the heart.

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The family of Joshua Solomon in Georgia honor their son's memory by raising thousands of dollars for the St. Jude brain tumor program in the hope of sparing another family the heartbreak they experienced.

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From cancer survivor to cancer researcher, Adam Ferrari from Indiana draws on the care he received at St. Jude, and his mother's diligence in chronicling the journey.







## United by Hope

St. Jude Children's Research Hospital is a healing force that's felt in every corner of the country, from coast to coast and beyond. In **Kodiak Island, Alaska**, you'll find school teacher Brandi Noe, a survivor of retinoblastoma as a young girl, living a bold and adventurous life made possible by St. Jude.





Read the  
full story



# CHILD'S HEARTFELT, 75-CENT DONATION TO ST. JUDE DECADES AGO RESONATES WITH WASHINGTON MAN EVEN TODAY

By Kristina Goetz - ALSAC



## RIDGEFIELD, Washington

**N**athan Ehline wasn't supposed to live.

His mother's water broke at 18 weeks, and she carried him with only a teaspoon of amniotic fluid under his neck until he was born at 31 weeks.

The prognosis was bleak. Walnut-sized lungs, the doctors said. He weighed 3.6 pounds.

"At first, we were planning his funeral," Nathan's dad, Brian Ehline, said. "And then the doctors came in

a little more giddy. They said, 'This is going to be a roller coaster. You're going to have times when we don't think it's going to be good, times when we think it's good.'

"Probably about a month into it they were like: This young man is going to make it."

That's when doctors told the Ehlines about Nathan's cerebral palsy — a condition that developed because of lack of oxygen to his brain. Even though the Ehlines took Nathan home, his survival was still uncertain.

Nathan's dad ran tubes down the hall of their 800-square-foot farmhouse so they could move him from bedroom to living room and still provide the oxygen he needed to live.

They made their home in Ridgefield — still do — a small town surrounded by fertile farmlands and forests on the border of Oregon, about a half hour north of Portland. It's the kind of place where kids grow up with the same classmates all the way through high school in a bucolic setting along the Columbia River and a view of Mount St. Helens. With loving care, Nathan thrived.



That was 23 years ago.

All his life, Nathan has needed a wheelchair and help from a lot of people. It's one of the reasons he finds such joy in helping others – because he's received so much himself. It's why he raises money for charity, too, including St. Jude Children's Research Hospital.

His story is reminiscent of another young man with a big heart – one with a similar condition who made a modest but meaningful gift that dates back to a time when the hospital was still just Danny Thomas' dream. That story is now part of St. Jude lore.

Nathan would learn that boy's name – Billy Johnson – and all about his life-changing gift in 2019.

### **Prayer for a friend leads to surprising connection**

The Ehline family had for years gone to see Nathan's uncle John Elefante, frontman for the rock band Kansas, perform at the annual Warburton Celebrity Golf Tournament, a fundraiser for St. Jude. But their first personal connection to the hospital was through a little boy at church. He had a rare skin cancer and was being treated in Memphis.

A family of deep faith, the Ehlines often prayed for him.

That little boy's mom from church, DeeAnna Janku, works for ALSAC, the fundraising and awareness organization for St. Jude, in a field office near the Ehlines' home in Ridgefield.

She knew Nathan would be perfect to join the St. Jude Leadership Society in nearby Portland. It's a program for high school students to develop as leaders and support the work of St. Jude.

Nathan flew with his dad and a handful of other high schoolers to Memphis.

"When I rolled into the hospital, everybody was just so joyful," Nathan remembered. "... It hit me that there are people who are worse off than me. I have a way better situation than they do."





## 75 cents from a boy in a wheelchair

On a hospital tour, DeeAnna led Nathan down a long hallway lined with plaques of donor names. At one end was an inscription about a young boy named Billy Johnson who was blind, partially deaf and stricken with cerebral palsy who in 1959 handed Danny Thomas 75 cents – a 50-cent piece and a quarter – to help the kids at the hospital the entertainer wanted to build.

That gift of pocket change is now sealed in the cornerstone of the marble statue of St. Jude Thaddeus unveiled during the 1962 hospital dedication.

When Nathan heard about Billy – and his physical condition and the gift he gave Danny – he felt both moved and connected to the St. Jude long-standing mission in an even bigger way.

“I was like, wow, I’m part of history in a sense now,” Nathan said.

But Billy Johnson’s story is more than the soundbite version that often gets told, richer than the inscription people might miss in the abundance of art on the hospital walls.

It was 1959 when Jim Maloof – a confidant of Danny’s and one of the first businessmen he approached with the idea of St. Jude – invited the entertainer to his hometown of Peoria, Illinois. Both are deceased now, but Jim Maloof’s son Michael remembers his father’s oft-told story.

“They got in the car, and the state mental hospital is in a place called Bartonville,” Michael recalled. “It’s no longer a place. ... And Dad didn’t tell Danny where they were going. ‘Jim, you know I gotta be back to make a presentation. Where are we going?’ ‘Danny, listen. Don’t worry

**“I don’t think I’ve ever seen a more genuine expression of generosity in my life.”**

– Michael Maloof, quoting Danny’s words from his father’s story

about that. Don’t worry about that. Just trust me.”

The car crested a hill near the imposing limestone building. There, just over the ridge were 200 people – nurses in white uniforms and hats, doctors in white coats and hundreds of children.

“So this little boy in row two yells: ‘Danny! Danny!’ He stops, he looks over, and the nurse wheels him out. ‘Danny,’ he says, ‘I have something for the kids.’ He has this envelope. He says: ‘I’ve been saving my money because I want to help a child.’”

Danny Thomas knelt down in front of the boy. His name was Billy Johnson. He was 11 years old. He explained he’d been saving his candy and gum money to help the children the entertainer was trying to cure.

Danny Thomas wept.

“‘Thank you,’” Michael said, quoting Danny’s words from his father’s story. “‘This will be in my cornerstone. I don’t think I’ve ever seen a more genuine expression of generosity in my life. I will remember you always.’”

Nathan didn’t know the whole story of the 75 cents when he saw the inscription that day at St. Jude, but when he was later told, it got him talking about generosity and influence and taking care of other people.

Nathan himself has raised \$3,000 for St. Jude through his social media accounts.

“I love to make people happy,” he said. “That’s one of my mottos I live by. We need more people to take care of those less fortunate in life.”

Being part of the St. Jude life-saving mission for children with cancer is something Nathan is proud of. He wants to be an example of generosity.

Just like Billy Johnson was with his 50-cent piece and a quarter.

“It’s not a big amount of money, but to share it means the world,” he said.

“If you had 75 cents, what would you do with it?”





## NEW JERSEY

Tina Marshall was raised to lead a life of service by a family that prioritized giving back to its community. On a tour of St. Jude, the longtime volunteer had a “life-changing” moment with a grieving father. Since then, she’s helped raise funds for the lifesaving mission through the St. Jude Sunday of Hope program, while connecting congregations throughout New Jersey.



## MISSOURI

In 1987, a year before Lorenzo Sandlin became an elementary school principal, his firstborn son, Matthew, died at age 5 of Wilms tumor, a type of kidney cancer. After losing a child, Sandlin was driven to support St. Jude because, he says, of what he witnessed at the hospital: the care and compassion of the medical staff and the fight in the kids. So, he launched a St. Jude Math-A-Thon fundraiser at his school in Poplar Bluff and soon the entire community of 17,000 residents embraced the effort, raising more than \$1 million over the years.



# PROUD LEBANESE ROOTS TIE PENNSYLVANIA CONE MAKER TO ST. JUDE

By Richard Alley - ALSAC



## HERMITAGE, Pennsylvania

**W**hen you get down to it – when you really break the recipe down to its most basic ingredients – the two dreams are remarkably similar, each ensuring more kids go through life with a smile on their faces and joy in their hearts.

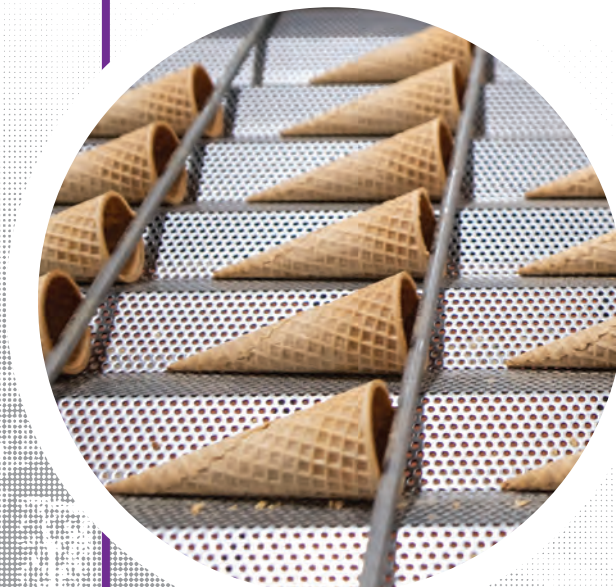
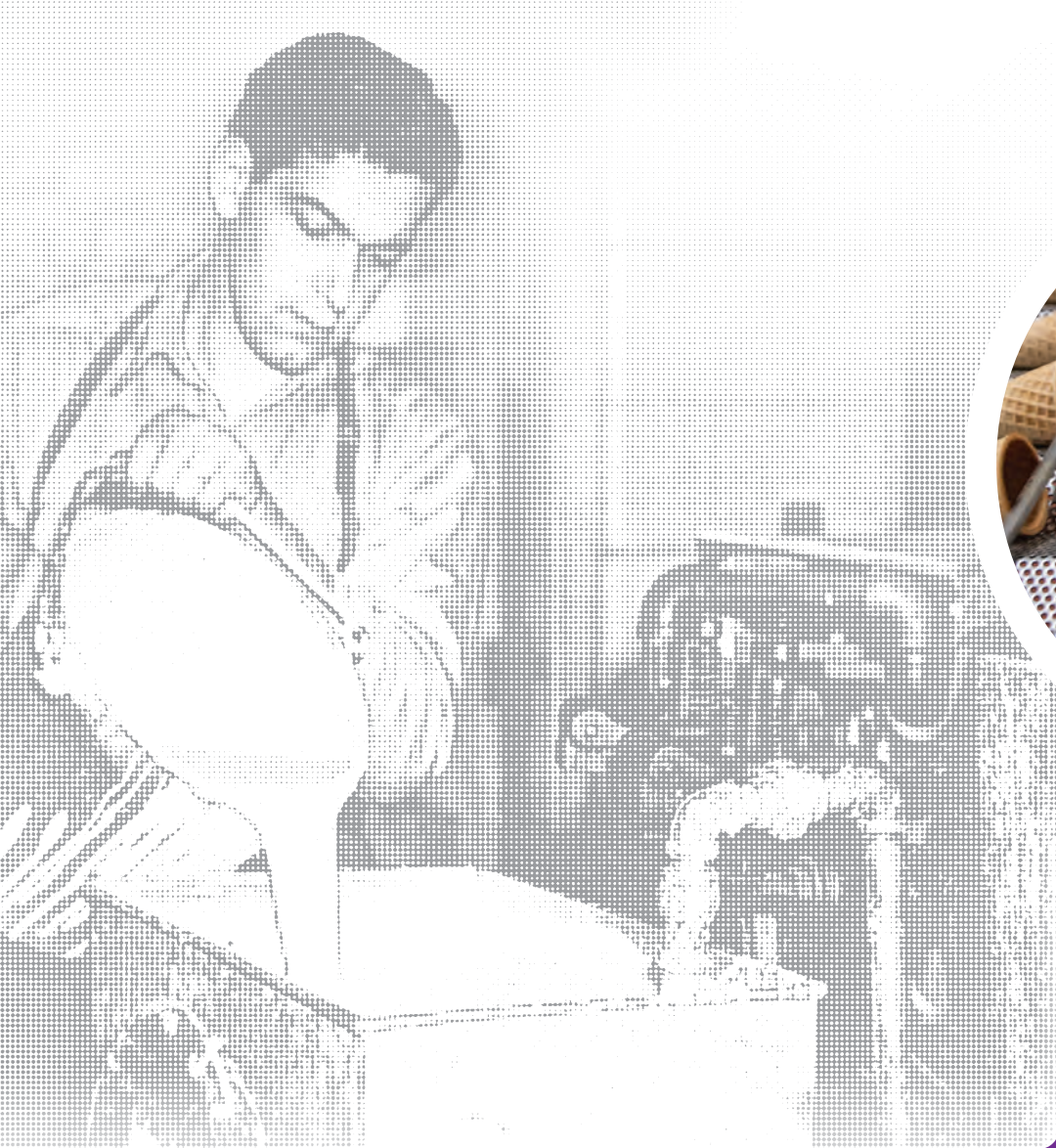
The similarities don’t end there. Both are dreams born from Lebanese-Americans with scant formal educations. Two dreams infused with the purpose, passion and tenacity of the early-20th century immigrant.

One is a specialty children’s research hospital in Memphis. An oasis of equality opened in a place and time of divisive segregation. Its focus on tackling the most devastating of pediatric diseases – most notably, leukemia.

The other is a global manufacturer of ice cream cones founded in Western Pennsylvania with a single, hand-operated oven. A company that would see its ups and downs, but would ultimately be known by the apt name of Joy.

This is the story of how a shared heritage – and a like-minded





willingness to share in success – unites two seemingly disparate organizations more than 700 miles apart.

### **“Standing proudly with our heads held high”**

There is a place on the campus of St. Jude Children’s Research Hospital that is hallowed ground to patients, employees and supporters alike. It is equal parts heart and institutional memory. A living, breathing museum. It was in the ALSAC/Danny Thomas Pavilion that David George, president and CEO of Joy Cone Co., came to a true

understanding of the connectivity heritage plays between his company and St. Jude.

“We always had this connection with heritage, but then reading it and the timelines were so similar and it just hit me, really strengthened the connections for me with my family and the St. Jude story. It was very moving for me,” David said.

*We, at long, long, last, shall take our rightful place in this community of nationalities – standing proudly with our heads held high in the knowledge that we have earned the right to perpetuate the name of our heritage and maintain our*

*reputation as unquestioned good American Citizens.*

Emblazoned in the Pavilion’s entrance, Danny Thomas’ words laid the foundation for American Lebanese Syrian Associated Charities (ALSAC), its sole purpose to this day to build and maintain St. Jude Children’s Research Hospital.

But more than that, those words gave Arab Americans across the country a cause to unite around, to be a part of and to take to heart as their own.

The Georges are part of that crusade of care. Three generations removed from his grandfather, David held his head high that day in the Pavilion and breathed in the resolute air of legacy.

“I learned about St. Jude early on from my dad, he would always like to point out Lebanese people that have done well,” David said. “As



**“Just to do something purely for others. It’s so wonderful and it’s the perfect example, really, of how a human should live their life.”**

– David George

a kid he’d point out that Danny Thomas is Lebanese and he has created this wonderful St. Jude Children’s Research Hospital and they’re doing amazing things there. He would send me articles on things that he’d seen about Danny Thomas or what they’re doing, so I always kind of kept tabs on it.”

### **A century of Joy**

In 2018, to celebrate its centennial year, Joy Cone Co. spread some of its joy to St. Jude in the form of a \$100,000 donation, and has made the same donation each year subsequently.

“We were thinking of how we wanted to celebrate it,” David said.

“Someone said let’s celebrate by making a major donation to a well-known [charity]. Right away we settled on St. Jude, it was a natural fit. It’s recognized by everybody, they do absolutely wonderful things.”

As a company, the thousand-plus employees of Joy are united behind the lifesaving mission and global outreach of St. Jude. “One of the things I’ve absolutely loved is how our employees have contributed to St. Jude,” David said. “They added over \$50,000 each year to our \$100,000, so the employees clearly felt the connection. A lot of employees really took it to heart.”

As a third-generation Lebanese-American, David is personally drawn to a shared heritage and Danny’s desire “just to do something purely for others. It’s so wonderful and it’s the perfect example, really, of how a human should live their life. They become successful and they give back.”

### **Doing for others**

Danny Thomas famously said, “Success has nothing to do with what you gain in life or accomplish for yourself. It’s what you do for others.”

David takes his cue from that sentiment and, more intimately, from his dad and the example he set not just for success, but “a desire to share in success not just with your employees, but with your community. When you give to your community, your community is strengthened, it’s a better place to live, a place people want to be.”

Today, this global operation with facilities in Pennsylvania, Iowa, Arizona and Mexico is a family-owned business, though maybe not in the way we typically think of family. Through the efforts of David and his dad, it’s an employee-owned business. Today, there are generations of family members who have clocked in every day at Joy to make ice cream cones and cookies and to bring the world a little more, well, joy.

And it’s this family feel that informs how and where the company gives back. “You look to the community you’re in first, but then from a national perspective there’s only a couple that we focus on and St. Jude was always one that we would contribute to,” David said.

### **“I am standing beside you”**

In the ALSAC/Danny Thomas Pavilion is a unique piece of artwork by international artist eL Seed. Fashioned from steel in calligraphic Arabic is a quote by Khalil Gibran, another son of Lebanon: *I am alive like you, and I am standing beside you. Close your eyes and look around, you will see me in front of you.*

As he stood in the Pavilion that day, David George was swaddled in heritage and legacy. Had he closed his eyes, he surely would have sensed the presence of his great-grandmother, his grandfather and his father standing there beside him and in front of him, leading the way. It’s the way of success, but also the way of selflessness, and of caring for your community no matter the distance.





## OHIO

Shirley Krcmar heard Danny Thomas speak at the Epsilon Sigma Alpha international council convention in 1970 about his dream to cure childhood cancer. His speech so moved her that it changed the course of her life. The Ohioan has been raising money for St. Jude Children's Research Hospital ever since. For five decades her devotion to Danny's dream has never wavered. She has baked pies, sewed quilts and organized luncheons to help more children live to fulfill their dreams. "I think I'm gonna live to be 100 so I can't imagine I wouldn't keep doing it," she said.



## NEVADA

If you've attended a St. Jude fundraiser in Las Vegas, you've probably been entertained by Van Johnson, the 'St. Jude DJ.' Energetic and joyful, just like the songs he plays, the retired Marine brings enthusiasm and upbeat music to all types of fundraising events, from fashion shows to poker tournaments. Van says he loves to see people happy and having fun, especially when it's for a great cause. And when joy meets hope, out there on the dance floor with a favorite song playing, all to benefit the kids of St. Jude? "It's darn near spiritual," he said.



# WHEN ST. JUDE BECOMES HOME AND ITS HOME IN MEMPHIS BECOMES YOURS

By Ruma Kumar - ALSAC



## MEMPHIS, Tennessee

Sitting in her bedroom in Caracas, Venezuela, Astrid Velasquez ran her slim, nimble fingers over her son Pedro's belly. He had come home from kindergarten early and been uncharacteristically listless. She felt a swollen liver and spleen, warnings of serious infection or disease. She took him to the pediatrician, who immediately hospitalized Pedro. Within hours, Astrid learned her 5-year-old son had leukemia.



Hearing the diagnosis felt like a tectonic shift: the ground unstable, all the truths and plans she held for certain, now vulnerable and tilting out of reach. Astrid and her husband Pedro Sr., both Harvard-trained physicians, had just opened a new medical practice, bought a new home, had a baby. This was supposed to be a time of growth and prosperity, not fear and loss.

Astrid remembers her prayer. *"Please God, please help me keep my family whole."*

The pediatrician caring for Pedro Jr. promptly referred them to St. Jude Children's Research

Hospital and the little boy thankfully qualified for one of the protocols the research hospital was implementing. In 48 hours, the family was on a plane to Memphis.

They knew little of the city they hurtled towards. Someone had told them it was known for barbecue, FedEx and Elvis. Could their son's life be saved in such a city?

It turned out the St. Jude campus in Memphis could not only save Pedro Jr., but forge a stronger and larger family than the Velasquezes could have imagined.



This larger family consisted of other international patients like them, coming from all corners of the globe to avail themselves of the clinical trials and novel therapies that allowed St. Jude to deliver some of the best worldwide outcomes in rare and aggressive childhood cancers and catastrophic disease.

Yes, St. Jude treated their children, but entire families were healed and fortified here, too. These families, once strangers, stitched together a rich and diverse support network here on the bluffs above the Mississippi River, bound by their common journey of treatment at St. Jude.

Some of them, who'd arrived in Memphis in the throes of panic and worry to save a child's life, stayed long after treatment and put down roots. The people at St. Jude became family and Memphis became home.

It happened that way for the Velasquezes, who are now marking their 24th year in Memphis. They run a network of non-profit clinics and pharmacies to treat and prevent obesity, diabetes and other related conditions in the most underserved, low-income corners of the city. Every year, they treat more than 35,000 patients, lifting up the health of a community that saved their son two decades ago.

Pedro, now 30 years old, is the executive director of the clinics called Lifedoc Health and drove the effort to establish their non-profit status. He is leading a plan to expand the clinics into 11 more underserved neighborhoods over the next 5 years.

"Compassion influenced my parents' decision to stay and give back to the city and the people that showed them so much kindness," he said. "And it's what drives me, too."

Compassion and kindness were evident from the first moments they arrived in Memphis in 1997. They were greeted by the father of another Venezuelan patient who was being treated for a solid tumor. The man was surprisingly upbeat, joking and full of advice. He drove them around the city and told them they'd come to the right place.

"His message was about hope, hope, hope," Pedro Sr. said.

They found kindness in simple, unexpected gestures. It was there in the nurse who bribed Pedro's cooperation during bloodwork using candy, and in the world-renowned oncologist who distracted Pedro from his anxiety by quizzing him on multiplication tables.

**"I feel a duty to do something to give back, make a difference with the life I've been given."**

– Pedro Velasquez





Pedro's treatment was not easy, and oncologists at St. Jude would spend two and a half years trying to eradicate the aggressive T-cell variation of acute lymphoblastic leukemia he had. It very nearly worked.

His cancer was in remission, but just for six months, after which it returned with a vengeance. Through it all, the Velasquezes did not allow their son to find excuses to miss out on the normal parts of childhood: school, sibling rivalry, sports – he did it all as he fought cancer.

By 2001, 18 months after his second round of treatment, Pedro Jr.'s cancer was gone. He was 9 years old. Blessedly, it has not returned.

"I feel a duty to do something to give back, make a difference

with the life I've been given," Pedro said.

By the time he was in college, it was hard for Pedro to see how to repay such a gift.

But Pedro's father knew exactly what to do to give back to the city that had allowed his family to stay complete and not suffer loss. As a faculty member and physician at the University of Tennessee Health Science Center and later LeBonheur Children's Hospital, he saw first-hand the toll obesity was taking on minority populations in the most underserved communities of Memphis. He sought to fill a need he saw for high-quality care for low-income patients and founded the clinics and pharmacies.

These days, the whole family is involved, Astrid said. Gabriel, her

oldest son, created the pharmacy. Andy, the third youngest, coordinates the affiliated research company, and Alex, the youngest, is starting medical school this fall, hoping to return and add his expertise to the clinics. Pedro returned to Memphis after college in Miami to use the business knowledge he learned to run and expand the purpose of the clinics his parents founded.

"Because of St. Jude, because of all the kindness we received from the people in Memphis, because of my parents, there was no mentality of *if you make it*. Cancer doesn't have to be debilitating. Even now I tell other families, you don't have to coach a child with cancer to be a victim. Cancer does not define us, but when we survive it, we have the strength to make a real difference in the world."

Dear stJudes Hospital,  
I'm Donating my money  
to you guys Because a  
mirical comes from the heart  
I know \$40¢ dosent seem like  
alot but little things go along way  
From Caroline and I'm 8 years



## NORTH CAROLINA

When our founder Danny Thomas said, "I'd rather have a million people give me a dollar than one give me a million," he was talking about people like Caroline, an 8-year-old from North Carolina who sent this letter to St. Jude.





# GEORGIA FAMILY FINDS 'PURPOSE IN THE PAIN' AFTER LOSING SON AT ST. JUDE

By Ruma Kumar - ALSAC

## MACON, Georgia

**J**oshua Solomon hummed and sang absentmindedly, while playing with his toy trains. The gospel hymns he learned in preschool were his favorite.

*This is the day...hmm hmm hmm...the Lord has made.... hmm hmm hmm...*

When you ask about Joshua, these are the kinds of details his parents Labrina and Trent Solomon share: the simple, even mundane moments they treasure more than a decade after losing their son to cancer.

"The hurt and the heartache, they never go away," Labrina said. "But you got to keep moving forward and find purpose in the pain."

When they talk about what matters most to them, the Solomons tell you about serving family, faith and community. Over the last 12 years, the Solomons have spurred thousands of residents to support the mission of St. Jude Children's Research Hospital, an institution nearly 500 miles away from their hometown, Macon, Georgia. Their efforts have raised more than \$173,000 for the brain tumor program, in the hope to spare another family the heartbreak they experienced.

Joshua's illness came suddenly on a family road trip to Alabama.

Just after breakfast outside Anniston, Alabama, Joshua threw up and complained of a tight pressure and pain in his neck. The family headed to the nearest emergency room, where a CT scan showed something "suspicious." Doctors suggested the family take an ambulance to Birmingham Children's Hospital.

In Birmingham, an MRI soon revealed Joshua had a tumor on his brain stem. It was inoperable.

This cancer stretched like a mesh across the pons, the part of the brain stem that controls actions like breathing and swallowing. Every year, about 300 children in the U.S., usually between the ages of 5 and 9, were diagnosed with Diffuse Intrinsic Pontine Glioma (DIPG), and now Joshua was one of them. He had roughly 12 months to live.





"We were devastated," Labrina said. "We would look online to look up information about it and it would be so depressing," she said. Her searches found words like "uniformly fatal."

Joshua was referred to St. Jude just three weeks after his diagnosis, and received one and a half months of chemotherapy and radiation. He responded surprisingly well, and the family returned home in time for Thanksgiving full of relief and gratitude. At their follow-up checkup in December, Joshua's tumor was barely visible. Labrina and Trent felt optimistic for the first time in months.

As a special treat, Joshua and his parents were invited to New York City that December to ring the NASDAQ bell with Marlo Thomas, the National Outreach Director for St. Jude. He ended 2008 in New York City and began 2009 on a cruise to the Bahamas. It was an exciting time because Labrina was 5 months pregnant with another son by then and Joshua was eager to be a big brother.

But when they returned home after the trip, an intense fatigue swept over Joshua. They came back to St. Jude in March, earlier than scheduled. The tumor had grown. This time, the chemotherapy did nothing to stop it. Joshua passed away August 14, 2009, barely 11 months after his diagnosis. In the months after losing her son, the guilt of whether she'd done enough to help Joshua weighed on Labrina. She threw herself into research. What she found surprised her.

Joshua's type of childhood brain cancer is exceedingly rare and as a result there's been little progress in research funding or treatment since the early 1960s when it first emerged into the public consciousness after astronaut Neil Armstrong's daughter "Muffie" died from it. (He would name a crater on the moon after her.) Making it more difficult, a DIPG diagnosis often came in the late stages, and the location of the cancer in the brain stem made it impossible to surgically remove.

Labrina and Trent decided information and awareness would lessen the hurdles other DIPG families faced. They started a non-profit named Joshua's Wish in January 2010, a month before Joshua would have turned 6.

Since its inception, Joshua's Wish has hosted a series of events before the COVID-19 pandemic, including silent auctions, dinner and dances on Joshua's birthday every February and 5K walks and runs. Donations have gone to the St. Jude brain tumor program, college scholarships and to help Macon-area families with cancer.

Along the way, their fundraising events have stitched together supporters from church members to local celebrities from Macon-area television news stations. Labrina and Trent hadn't anticipated that their loss could help grow community, but they say they feel Joshua's hand in this.

"When I do this work, I see that Joshua's life, short as it was, wasn't in vain. It had purpose and it continues to give us purpose," Labrina said.



## NEW HAMPSHIRE

It was during a virtual event with fellow St. Jude supporters in early 2021 that 95-year-old Jim Guth found himself being serenaded with an online rendition of "Happy Birthday." His good friend, Frank McLean, had made it possible by bringing an iPad to Jim at his New Hampshire nursing home. But Jim, who had had become like a second father to Frank, passed away the following day. Jim and his late wife, Jo, had taken up the St. Jude mission years earlier. Frank said it meant so much for Jim to see one more time the impact of their support. "Oh, how he loved that," Frank said.



## WEST VIRGINIA

Zach Meadows spent so much time in hospitals he didn't feel like a normal kid until sixth grade. When Zach was 7 years old, he was diagnosed with a non-cancerous brain tumor - a craniopharyngioma. Despite two brain surgeries and radiation therapy, the tumor kept coming back. Then his family found St. Jude Children's Research Hospital, which successfully treated the tumor. Now, Zach's a fifth-grade teacher in West Virginia who gives his students lessons in more than just math, science and reading. "The main thing," he tells his students, "is never give up."





## ST. JUDE TREATMENT OF SICKLE CELL DISEASE HITS CLOSE TO HOME FOR THIS MISSISSIPPI POTTERY SHOP

By Kelly COX - ALSAC

### MOUND BAYOU, Mississippi

**W**hat would become Peter Woods' career began with a childish pastime: making mud pies while his parents, both sharecroppers, worked the land. Today, family-owned Peter's Pottery draws collectors from all over and ships its wares across the globe.

As a Black-owned business committed to investing in the community, Peter's Pottery recalls the heyday of its birthplace: Mound

Bayou. Founded in 1887 by and for formerly enslaved African Americans, Mound Bayou for many decades boasted Black-owned industry, thriving infrastructure and public spaces, and a hospital where Black doctors tended Black patients from all over the Delta.

The hospital is now shuttered, and Mound Bayou has fallen on hard times. But Peter's Pottery continues to give back. And since the arrival of R.J., Peter's great-nephew and "spitting image," the shop's giving has extended to St. Jude Children's Research Hospital, where R.J. receives treatment for sickle cell disease. St. Jude, with one of the largest sickle cell programs in the country, has led advances that have lifted the life expectancy for a sickle cell patient by 20 years.

R.J. is living proof of both the progress — and the work still to be done. Peter doesn't know if R.J., whom he has taken under his wing, will follow in his footsteps in the family business. But as St. Jude's work on sickle cell disease continues, Peter has faith in a promising future for R.J., wherever in the world he goes.



### SOUTH DAKOTA

If you pass a baby blue truck driving across the Mount Rushmore state, that's probably Henry Hanten on his way to another St. Jude fundraising radiothon. He's traveled 50,000 miles while volunteering at Country Cares for St. Jude Kids® Radiothons over the last 30 years. "It is over 50,000, they say. I've got 92 radiothons in. I need eight to make 100," Hanten said. "Snowstorms, rain. You name it, I've been through it."







# ST. JUDE CAME TOO LATE FOR HER LITTLE SISTER, BUT KANSAS WOMAN HOLDS IT DEAR

By Zack McMillin - ALSAC

## HAYS, Kansas

**L**inn Ann Huntington's drive to support St. Jude began at an early age, after her little sister passed just 34 days before St. Jude opened in 1962. She has been supporting the hospital for decades and still continues to do so today.

When Linn Ann journeyed in 2006 from her home in central Kansas to see St. Jude for the first time, she wasn't sure what to expect.

For her, the memories were still vivid of Susan being diagnosed in Oklahoma as a 3-year-old with

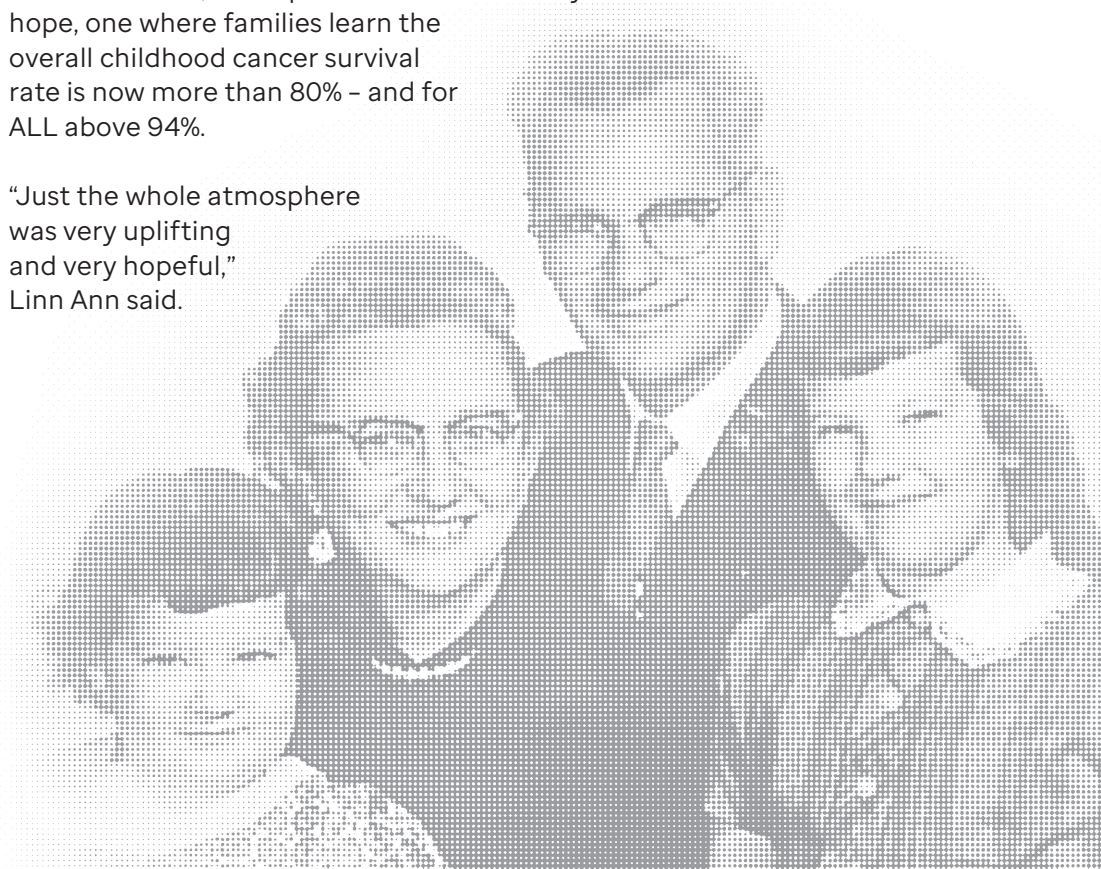
acute lymphoblastic leukemia (ALL) – the survival rate for ALL 60 years ago was only 4%. The previous year, in 2005, Linn Ann had suffered two more losses, when her mother and husband died within months.

What she found on that visit, and two more since, was a place of hope, one where families learn the overall childhood cancer survival rate is now more than 80% – and for ALL above 94%.

"Just the whole atmosphere was very uplifting and very hopeful," Linn Ann said.

When Linn Ann returned to Kansas, she submitted a piece about the trip to the local newspaper, The Hays Daily News.

"I've been a little low on miracles lately," Linn Ann wrote. "It's nice to visit a place where they occur on a daily basis."



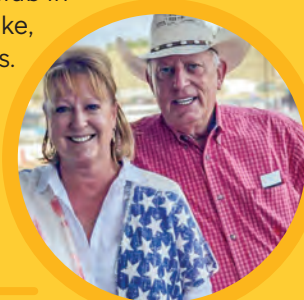
## MASSACHUSETTS

In 2017, just as Serafin Garcia's life was poised to take off, came news that could have meant it was ending. Instead of leaving home for a prestigious university, as planned, he left home for St. Jude, for treatment of brain cancer. But now, after this surprise "gap year," Serafin is a computer science major, a member of the crew team and a dedicated mentor of high school students in the greater Boston area.



## WYOMING

It takes many small streams to make a great river. That's the guiding principle for Larry and Susan Patrick, whose Big Horn Radio Network broadcasts a St. Jude radiothon each year to enlist the support of hard-working families in small towns across northern Wyoming. The radiothon is kicked off by a charity dinner at an Old West supper club in Cody in a night that can include karaoke, arm wrestling and egg-smash contests. In an area where incomes can be lean but hearts are big, it adds up a river of support for St. Jude. "The people of Wyoming have been so generous," Susan Patrick said.







# INDIANA CHILDHOOD CANCER SURVIVOR FINDS 'RECIPE FOR LIFE' IN MOM'S ST. JUDE JOURNAL

By Betsy Taylor - ALSAC

## EVANSVILLE, Indiana

**E**ight years ago in Evansville, Adam Ferrari, then a college sophomore at the University of Southern Indiana, had his mind blown.

He was reading the details of his chemotherapy treatment, the pages held within a dusty three-ring binder.

The notebook was one of several mementos from St. Jude Children's Research Hospital his mom, a nurse, had stashed in a bin in the attic of his childhood home.



Adam could see that for the entirety of his 2 ½-year treatment for acute lymphoblastic leukemia, which began in 2000 when he was 7, she'd documented every chemo, the dosages, and the day-to-day effects it had on his blood counts.

She'd carried that vast investment of time and heart around to every appointment, but for Adam as a child with cancer, the notebook had been invisible because of its ubiquity.

Now he felt awestruck by it.

"This is the recipe for my life," Adam remembered thinking. "This is what gave me life.

"...At that moment, I knew what I wanted to do with my life is to build one of these. To put the puzzle together for someone else."

Today, Adam, 28, devotes his professional life to unlocking the mysteries of fatal ovarian cancer as a researcher and cancer biologist.

*Read the full story*



## CONNECTICUT

Arturo Natalino was a teenager in the early 1960s when a neighborhood youth received a grim diagnosis: leukemia. Wanting to help, his parents and siblings decided to raise money for a then-fledgling St. Jude. Decades later, three generations of Natalinos have maintained a long-running fundraising team to aid the lifesaving mission of St. Jude. Their family's coin-jar drives, golf tournaments, dances and dinners have become a fixture drawing the support of New Haven.



## IDAHO

The Idaho St. Jude Dream Home® Giveaway is one of the most successful fundraisers of its kind in the nation. Berkeley Building has partnered with St. Jude for years to supply the home, but this program is in some ways the house that Jack built – Jack, 15-year-old St. Jude survivor of craniopharyngioma, who beat an aggressive brain tumor to come home to Idaho and a full life. Jack is the unofficial face of the fundraiser, proving to area residents that the home is more than "bricks and sticks at the end of the day," said builder Joe Atalla. It's hope for kids like Jack.



## THE HEART OF CLEBURNE: HOW THE KINDNESS OF A LITTLE TEXAS BOY LIVES ON

By Betsy Taylor - ALSAC

### CLEBURNE, Texas

Seventeen Green could barely pull the manila envelope from the mailbox, so he worked with it for a moment. The kids at Coleman Elementary School had sent something special for his daughter Cami, with love from Cleburne, Texas, and here it was.

He told Cami the gift came from Brody's cousins and schoolmates: hundreds of cards made just for her and sent to her home in North Carolina. Brody had been her best friend at St. Jude, on the same novel treatment plan for a rare and aggressive brain cancer. He had died in August 2019.

"When she opened it up, she looked at them all, and she said, 'Dad, I want you to pour them over me.'"

So that's what he did. He lifted the cards up and let them spill on top of his daughter's head.

The room filled with a confetti of kindness.

Some cards had drawings of unicorns or rainbows. Some had knock-knock jokes, or "I'm writing to you because you were Brody's friend..."

It wasn't so much about Cami being sick, but about, How can we make Cami smile?

In other words, pure Brody.

"I'm rich, I'm rich!" she said.

Rich with cards, rich with love.

[Read the full story](#)



## NORTH DAKOTA

Paige Lazorenko grew up loving and playing hockey in North Dakota. But when she was diagnosed with stage III melanoma in high school she hung up her No. 7 jersey and skates, and traveled a thousand miles to St. Jude for treatment. At St. Jude she found community and gained a second chance at life. Now, five years out of remission, she channels her positive perspective into helping others cherish and champion the life in them.



## CALIFORNIA

What could be harder than running a marathon? Running in nearly 40 pounds of firefighter gear. But that's exactly what Jose Zambrano, a California firefighter, does to draw attention and support for St. Jude, a cause he took up after a friend's daughter died of cancer. In countless marathons, he wears a firefighter's jacket, pants, suspenders, breathing tank and helmet - drawing amazed stares from spectators. On training runs, drivers stop to ask, "Did the engine drop you off? They forget about you?" His wife says that's the point: "He'll just point up at the shield and give them a thumbs up - to remind them, it's not about me. I'm running for St. Jude."





# SALUTING THE ARMY VETS WHO HELPED A LITTLE SOUTH CAROLINA BOY THROUGH CANCER AT ST. JUDE

By Betsy Taylor - ALSAC

## COLUMBIA, South Carolina

**O**n the airplane in January 2009, Rachel Pertile couldn't stop crying.

It wound up being a lucky thing.

The day before, her 5-year-old Evan, sick with brain cancer and getting treatment at St. Jude Children's Research Hospital, had handed her a clump of his hair.

Today she was flying away from him to spend time in Columbia, South Carolina, with her other three boys.

The woman sitting next to Rachel  
– Brenda Bowen of Leavenworth,

Kansas – saw Rachel's pain, and talked with her. When Rachel learned Brenda worked at the Fort Leavenworth Army installation, she told her how Evan had always loved "Army guys."

Brenda had a light bulb: What if she could get some soldiers to send messages to Evan?

Over the next several months, soldiers from all branches of the military sent words of encouragement, badges and pins, Purple Hearts and coins, uniforms and flags. They visited him and urged Evan to eat his

food to be "Army strong."

"It changed his course, really," said Rachel.

Evan started college last fall. He thinks about the soldiers and the other St. Jude kids, still fighting.

"I would love to go back [to St. Jude] and share my experience with people and give them hope that helps them say, 'You can overcome it.'"

Just like the soldiers did for him.



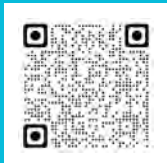
## MARYLAND

The cost of a single pill made Sharon Hurd of Maryland an advocate and supporter of St. Jude Children's Research Hospital for life. Sharon's son, Andrew, was treated at St. Jude for a sub-type of acute lymphoblastic leukemia – treatment that saved his life. But it was a \$367 pill, which came to represent, for Sharon, everything good and giving about St. Jude. It wasn't until she began researching treatment cost that she discovered each pill was \$367. If Andrew hadn't been at St. Jude, he wouldn't have been on the trial medication, Sharon's insurance wouldn't have covered it, and she wouldn't have been able to afford it on her own. Being at St. Jude meant having access to the trial medication, to additional treatment options – and no worries about the costs, which were covered by St. Jude.



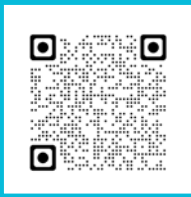
# SIGHTS AND SOUNDS OF ST. JUDE

Scan the QR codes to see and hear more about what St. Jude means to the people in these communities.



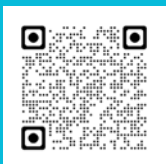
## LOUISIANA

A patient, his mom and his teacher represent the Louisiana community that's worked for 45 years to make a difference at St. Jude two states over, and ultimately, everywhere. Listen to Omari's story.



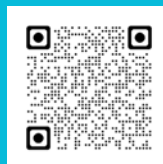
## NEW MEXICO

Austin Denton filled his all-too-short life with heart, spirit and unforgettable moments pursuing his dream of a sports broadcasting career. He interviewed Peyton Manning at Super Bowl 50. He announced a first-round pick of his beloved Denver Broncos at the NFL draft. And he inspired people in his home state, and far beyond, to live with purpose. Honor his memory by watching his highlight reel.



## ILLINOIS

Years after St. Jude saved his life, Jeremiah Godby returned to campus and saw the need for an outdoor space for spiritual healing. Watch how he made it happen.



## PUERTO RICO

Young Yamila mirrors the determination of her Puerto Rican homeland. Learn about how her homeland is unstoppable in its support of St. Jude.



Dear friends,

This is without a doubt the most difficult letter I have ever written.

As I can no longer support the suffering children of St. Jude Children's Research Hospital. I have been using a portion of my social security check to send my donations to St. Jude. This is my only income.

I have been very sick. I was diagnosed with multiple myeloma (bone cancer) and aggressive systemic mastocytosis. I am the only person in medical literature, according to the University of Michigan Comprehensive Cancer Center, who has both diseases.

I gave extra bone marrow for research; this will not help me, but in the future it may help a child or an adult. The hardest thing about going to visit the University of Michigan Comprehensive Cancer Center is seeing so many children who have cancer, who, without help, have no chance to live.

It's so heartbreaking.

I am an old man now. I am 69 and have had a good life. But now,



## MICHIGAN

Ira Jackson was a long-time St. Jude supporter who donated a portion of his Social Security check every month – his only source of income. When doctors told Ira he was terminally ill, his first thought was not about himself, but rather the children of St. Jude.

Watch the video



I spend so much of my Social Security benefits for medical needs, just to keep the pain in control, that I have nothing left at the end of the month. So, the gist of this letter is to ask just one person to take my place & continue to contribute to St. Jude. Please, these children need you. I can no longer help. I was told I will die soon. I am prepared for death, but these little children should have their chance to play & grow into healthy adults.

It is my last wish that you use this letter to find just one person who will say, "I'll take Ira's place."

Thank you all and may our Creator bless you.

Ira H. Jackson



## ARKANSAS

Some of Nikki Morris's rural childhood was idyllic, like summer days among her grandma's fruit trees. And some of it wasn't, like car trips to St. Jude for treatment and checkups. Having lost an eye to cancer, she grew up feeling a little different. When she left her small community for the city, she felt more different still. She is now using her firsthand experience, her natural empathy and high-level training as the first paraprofessional in Arkansas credentialed as a deaf-blind intervener, working to empower students to live as adaptively, independently and fully as each of them can.







## ST. JUDE PATIENT STARS ON IOWA STATE CYCLONES' TEAM WITHOUT SCORING A POINT

When Iowa State University women's basketball coach Bill Fennelly was diagnosed with cancer in 2011, a member of his team offered up some advice. It was 5-year-old Elise, an honorary teammate, fan favorite, all-American inspiration St. Jude patient who had faced cancer herself a year earlier. "Don't worry about when you go to the doctor," Elise told the Coach, later asking her mother, "Does he want to go to St. Jude? I'll go with him."



## KENTUCKY

Dwane Casey, coach of the NBA's Detroit Pistons, was raised in basketball country – also known as Kentucky – by his grandparents, who didn't just tell him to be a good and giving person. They showed him how. His grandfather's monthly donations to St. Jude inspired Casey to support the cause every chance he gets, from bringing his teams to campus visits to sporting a St. Jude pin during games. "He didn't have a lot of money," Casey said of his grandfather. "It was \$10, \$15 a month, but it was from his heart."







## VIRGINIA

When one neighbor has a need in the tiny town of Damascus (pop. 814), a scenic stop on the Appalachian Trail, the other neighbors come to their aid. Resident Jim Watson first learned about St. Jude years ago, when a family from church had a child diagnosed with cancer and Jim helped them get to Memphis. Later his son, Cade, was treated at St. Jude, too. Now, Cade and his family and the other members of Team Cade hold several fundraisers throughout the year in support of St. Jude. To date, they have raised over \$500,000.



## WISCONSIN

It could be a country tune — something about a headstrong woman devoted to the person or in this case, a cause, she loves. Each winter for more than 20 years, Julie Wurl has organized volunteers for the Country Cares for St. Jude Kids® Radiothons in Green Bay, Wausau, Sheboygan and Milwaukee. She has her St. Jude radiothon time off stipulated in her work contract, and she spends a lot of it driving — or sliding if there's an ice storm. "Every radiothon season we joke about what Mother Nature is going to throw at us." But she'll go anywhere for St. Jude.



## MINNESOTA

Social media star B. "Fat Cat" Newton is a master of silly humor and side-splitting laughs, but his love for St. Jude and sick kids is straight from the heart. He shares his humor and stories from his childhood with his fishing fans to raise money for St. Jude. As a kid with cancer, "I learned how to deal with different people — new people always sticking needles in my arm," Newton said. "I think me cracking jokes as a kid and everything kind of helped me and the people around me deal with the situation."



## ALABAMA

In 2013, Danielle was a busy single mom suddenly launched into the unknown by her youngest son's cancer diagnosis. Where Devon lives in Alabama is terrible for allergies, but the headaches he felt back then weren't from a sinus infection. Today, Devon is in high school after treatment at St. Jude, and all these years later, Danielle admits she still worries. But when she sees Devon so full of life, she sees a bright future ahead.



**Chase Burch Marmolejo:**

## From Utah with love: When the Tabernacle Choir sang to me

*When 10-year-old Chase Burch Marmolejo was diagnosed with a rare brain tumor and sent to St. Jude Children's Research Hospital – more than a thousand miles from her home in California – she longed for the comfort, peace and familiarity of home. It came from an unexpected place, from Salt Lake City, the home of The Tabernacle Choir at Temple Square.*

**A**t 10 years old, I was rushed in an ambulance to our local children's hospital with a mass on my brain. It was medulloblastoma, an aggressive, cancerous brain tumor that required emergency surgery.

The doctors at our local hospital told my parents I would need to go through 16 grueling months of radiation therapy and chemotherapy. But once those doctors left the room, my mom turned to my dad and said, "This is not our only option. You go find the very best place for our little girl."

My dad is a professor of statistics. He lives and breathes research and data. He read everything he could find on medulloblastoma and came back with one answer: St. Jude Children's Research Hospital. The treatment there, he reported, was half the time with better results.



But it wasn't easy. Chemotherapy kept me bedridden, and my immune system dropped to zero. We lived at Target House in Memphis.

That's when we got a call from family friends traveling with the Tabernacle Choir on tour. They wanted to get some members of the choir together to come sing to me.

At the hotel, we were greeted by our friends and walked through the double doors. And there in front of us was the entire Tabernacle Choir. It looked like five stories of angels to my 10-year-old eyes.

After my diagnosis and initial surgery, I was told I may never walk or run again. I was told the treatments would most likely leave me with major learning disabilities.

Instead, I recently graduated from college with a bachelor's degree in Communications. I'm happily married now to my best friend who I have known since second grade. We were married in the Salt Lake Temple in 2017, and I had the opportunity then to thank the choir for singing to me that day back in Memphis.

Now, I can proudly say I'm 14 years cancer-free!



**Bianca:**

# St. Jude saved my little brother in Florida. This is how I say thank you.



*Bianca's little brother Beckett was diagnosed with leukemia and treated at St. Jude when he was 9. The experience inspired her to raise money for the organization that saved his life. It was her thank you. Now a student at the University of Florida, this is her story.*

It was the summer before my eighth grade year when my brother Beckett got sick. I clearly remember I was in my bathing suit and shorts, standing in the Florida heat outside the car, and my mother told my sister and me that my brother was very sick and had a disease called leukemia. We drove to the hospital where Beckett was. I was so scared. His face was washed out, but he was in a good mood. The doctors told him he had leukemia, but my brother didn't know that was cancer because they didn't say the Big C word. Beckett was only 9. I was 13.

When I went into eighth grade, my mom and my brother moved to Memphis. My dad worked long hours as a chiropractor so I kind of

became my younger sister's stand-in mom for that year. I cooked. I did the chores around the house. I played soccer, and my sister was in competitive cheer so I had to find us rides.

There was so much we missed as a family. We couldn't go to the amusement park together or out on the boat with family friends. We missed our Sunday night pizza dinners or eating out at a restaurant on the Intracoastal with a view of the famous Jupiter lighthouse.

On top of all that, I slowly watched my brother deteriorate. My mom would send us pictures, and we would video chat at night. Beckett would be like: "Hi guys. I love you. I miss you." And he just did not look good. I saw him lose weight. I saw him go bald. I saw him in a wheelchair. It was really hard to watch.

Around Christmas time that year, we packed our winter coats and went to Memphis to visit. It was probably the worst time of my brother's illness.

Eventually, Beckett got better, but he still had to go to St. Jude every month. For three years, July 2015 to February 2018 – from ages 9 to 12 – my brother was back and forth from the hospital, getting chemo treatments, getting medications.

When Beckett was officially cancer free, I remember my mom and him coming home to Palm Beach International Airport. Friends and family held signs as they walked up towards the end of the terminal. You could see my brother smile as he walked by.

At that moment, I decided I wanted to do something to help other families. That's when I decided to organize 5K events. I had one in 2018 and one in 2019, my junior and senior years of high school. The first year I had over 250 runners and raised just over \$25,000. The second year I raised \$31,000. It was such a great moment seeing my brother standing there at the finish line, healthy and happy. Seeing St. Jude save someone like that is incredible, and I want to help as much as I can.

**Corey Briscoe:**

## Washington, D.C. donor after St. Jude visit: You had me at hello

*When Corey Briscoe and three of his closest friends from Howard University started a business together – ABCD & Company, a national full-service marketing and events firm – they wanted to operate in thoughtful, giving ways. As their business grew, they found a model in St. Jude Children's Research Hospital. And they haven't just drawn inspiration from St. Jude, they've become big-hearted supporters, committing \$100,000 to the cause over four years.*

**I**t was the red wagons. That's what made it click. When I walked into St. Jude Children's Research Hospital and saw red wagons as the mode of transportation for its patients, I immediately understood the level of thoughtfulness they had given to care. To me, it showed St. Jude would go to any length to remove even the smallest element of trauma from the experience of the children and families it cares for.

When I saw those red wagons, it made sense that a specialty research hospital was not only leading the way in science and healthcare, but leading the way in culture and innovation. Yes, I was all in from the start.



Not only because of the good work St. Jude was doing each day, but because of the potential that exists in this mission. The St. Jude history of inclusion and equity is powerful, and I saw an opportunity to champion St. Jude in my community and network.

Historically, the African-American community is a powerhouse of giving, whether it's church or civic organizations. This power is also reflected in the work of St. Jude. In this time of what I would call racial reckoning, challenges, and conversations, there are many institutions that are now conversations around race and equity. St. Jude was at the forefront of that. Just look at its history and the mission Danny Thomas was creating even before St. Jude opened in 1962.

Like they say: St. Jude isn't new to this, it's true to this. It has a proven

track record starting with being the first fully-integrated children's hospital in the South, and extending through its long history treating and searching for cures for sickle cell disease.

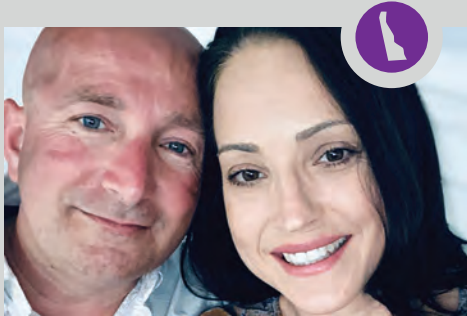
And so, not only did I and my friends and business partners fully commit to supporting and volunteering at St. Jude events, and serving on an advisory council for the D.C. market, but we looked to St. Jude when creating the culture of our own company. We strive to bring that level of excellence and equity into our work each day.

We want to match St. Jude in terms of thoughtfulness, consistency and partnerships. We know St. Jude sees itself as a place without walls; stretching to help kids in need in communities all across the world. With a message like that, how could it not spill over to impact the thinking of business leaders, too?



Dr. John 'Tony' DeVary:

# Delaware school counselor: St. Jude saved my life, then inspired it



*Dr. John 'Tony' DeVary is a Delaware middle-school guidance counselor approaching his 25th year in public education. He also works privately as a health consultant.*

I was 3, almost 4 years old, when I was diagnosed with non-Hodgkin lymphoma. It was stage IV, the most advanced stage, and doctors at our hometown hospital said I had about 36 hours to live.

I tell you this story today as a 45-year-old cancer survivor, thanks to St. Jude Children's Research Hospital, where I was sent as a last hope. But they didn't just save my life at St. Jude. They inspired every aspect of it.

I'm a public school guidance counselor, and a private health consultant in Delaware. I help people cope with their problems – middle-schoolers with depression and anxiety; adults with health conditions

from diabetes to cancer – by drawing on the ways St. Jude helped me cope with mine.

When I teach someone to use visualization or other mental skills techniques, I remember how I'd stare at my Snoopy stuffed animal during chemotherapy treatments at St. Jude to take my mind to some happier place.

Of course, St. Jude was for me, a happy place, a hopeful place. It wasn't just a hospital and I wasn't just patient No. 6,803. I was Tony – as St. Jude founder Danny Thomas himself called me, remembering my name, three years after we first met on campus. I was family.

I remember – vividly, still – how terrifying it was to hear the sound of the cart clicking on the floor tiles, approaching my room. That clicking sound meant one thing to me: a spinal tap. Even before the cart reached my room, I'd start to panic and cry. I'd start to hyperventilate. Then, after I explained what was happening, they began carrying the needles and vials they needed for the procedure instead of transporting them on the cart. It may seem like a small thing, but to a scared little boy it was the greatest gift.

And I remember Nerf gun battles and the security guard who would always hide a porcelain frog in a different spot in the garden for patients to find. I remember the little red wagons with the IV poles attached.

Whatever it would take, really, to make a hurting little boy smile.

And I was hurting. This was the late 1970s, before many of the scientific advances that have improved treatments and eased side effects that can plague patients

into adulthood. It took three years to achieve remission. I weighed only 17 pounds when I arrived at St. Jude, and grew very little during my time there.

I was fed with a tube through which everything looked like milk. I had blown veins in my arms from all the needle sticks during chemotherapy treatments so they started sticking my feet.

All these years later, I'm still dealing with the effects. I grew to only 5-feet tall, which was tough to handle as a teenager when my little brother and sister shot past me. It's still difficult to draw blood because of all the scar tissue from those needle sticks. I can't stand to drink milk, even now, because of the memory it evokes of the feeding tube. And I have to wear dentures because my teeth crack – yet another side effect of treatment.

But you know what? I have my life and my life is good. I'm a father despite concerns that I wouldn't be able to have children post-cancer. I'm a husband. And my life's work – helping people with their problems – is inspired every day by the place that saved my own life, the place that shaped me as a person.

Just a few years ago, when I found out that a grapefruit-size brain tumor was growing in my head, the apparent result of the radiation I received as a child, St. Jude was there again. Even though it was 27 years later, St. Jude worked collaboratively with doctors at The Johns Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore, helping save my life again.

Thank God for St. Jude, I always say. And thank St. Jude for the person I've become, the life I'm able to live, and for the help and hope I'm able to pass on to others who are hurting.



## MAINE

Sarah Emerson often laced up her running shoes to raise funds for St. Jude families in need. But it was her support for one neighboring Maine child battling a brain tumor that showed the unique power of community. After growing close to 9-year-old Nicholas and his family, holding a fundraiser with food trucks, a 5K run and music, Sarah got her own cancer diagnosis. The community she'd built flowed in reverse, with support from advice to help finishing her house renovation. Sarah later ran the Boston Marathon with Nicholas's initials on her shoes. With each other's help, they'd both made it.



## MONTANA

Cedar, 14, lost most of the vision in her right eye to a rare cancer – retinoblastoma – but her treatment as a toddler at St. Jude has allowed her to live a full life. And how: She rides horses, plays basketball, runs cross country, shows market steers, exhibits her own leatherwork and photography, and is looking forward to learning how to drive. She's also a wise soul, this daughter of the High Plains who talks about being surrounded by beautiful country and good people in eastern Montana. "Good, hard-working, humble people," she said. "And that's good to grow up around."



## RHODE ISLAND

After Renee Cotnoir lost her father to pancreatic cancer, she was determined to honor his legacy of service. In the last year, she and her husband have raised nearly \$10,000 for the kids of St. Jude, \$3,600 of which they raised during a 30-hour marathon stream on Twitch, the Amazon-owned platform where various gamers, artists and personalities livestream their interests and talents to an online audience. She and her husband Chris, who go by the names Rusty Rhymez and Lady Naginata, stream a cooking show and talk show live from their basement and kitchen in their small New England hometown.





## NEW YORK

Vinnie DePaola's home in Queens, New York, is more than 1,100 miles from St. Jude Children's Research Hospital in Memphis, but one day every year it feels as close as the neighborhood pub. That's the setting for 86-year-old Vinnie's annual fundraiser in support of St. Jude, his late beloved wife Camille's favorite charity. The event has brought in more than \$200,000 over six years, and he's always thinking of ways to make it bigger and better. "New people, new faces, new excitement," Vinnie said, sounding half his age.



## ARIZONA

Sometimes you're the one throwing the curveballs and sometimes, it's life that throws one at you. St. Jude patient Andrew (aka 'Bulldog') learned this lesson when he was just 17 years old. After being diagnosed with a rare skin cancer at 10, Andrew's passion for baseball fueled his strength to heal. Though the odds were against him, Andrew fought cancer while doing what he loved most – playing baseball, helping his team win state and regional championships along the way.



## COLORADO

Jessie Wagner was a snow skier by the age of 3. By her 18th birthday, she had been a St. Jude patient twice, with two unrelated cancers. In skiing slang, life has given Jessie some pow (smooth sailing), and it's given her some crud (rough conditions). But throughout, she has blazed a trail marked by a personal mission to be of service...as predicted by the St. Jude social worker who said of Jessie as a child, "She's going to want to help people, I can just tell; it's in her spirit."



## HAWAII

Sometimes in the middle of the Saddle Up for St. Jude trail ride on the Thompson Ranch in Maui, Theresa Thompson, the youngest of the 11 Thompson children born in nearby Kula Hospital and raised on Mt. Haleakala, will glance back and see the riders and their horses thread out across the mountain for more than a mile. She fills with a kind of lightness, a kind of happiness that's almost spiritual, "like church." Theresa and her brother Jerry Thompson have put on the annual trail ride, which has raised more than \$430,000 for St. Jude Children's Research Hospital, since 1992.



## OKLAHOMA

When 13-year-old Isaac was diagnosed with a brain tumor, a budding basketball career ended and a battle for life began. The family found hope and healing at St. Jude, and Isaac's dad, Tom, was inspired to write a book about the experience, with the beautiful spoiler-alert of a title, "When Hope Overcame the Impossible." It's a story about the cruelties of cancer and the spirit of a teenage boy who endured 21 surgeries, eight of them major operations on his brain. And it's a story about a place where the healing is more than just medical, where hope always has home-court advantage – St. Jude.



You can help ensure families never receive a bill from St. Jude for treatment, travel, housing or food. [stjude.org/donate](https://stjude.org/donate)



## NEBRASKA

Tim Peterson has run 13 marathons to raise more than \$51,000 for St. Jude. The retired minister and Nebraska businessman is inspired by two key moments in his life: surviving his own bout with prostate cancer and later meeting a grateful patient family from Jamaica who told him they were able to afford to save their daughter Azalea's life because of the generosity of St. Jude Heroes like him. Azalea's story of survival on his mind, along with his own, Tim trains for marathons along the trails that carve the northwestern fringes of Omaha.



## OREGON

Matilde Flores felt out of place after her family moved from Mexico to Idaho. Her lifeline? A classmate named Maria, who spoke Spanish. But when Maria stopped coming to school, Matilde was devastated to learn she died of cancer. Years later, that experience would fuel her passion for supporting St. Jude along with other members of Portland's proud Latino community. She has tirelessly recruited fellow runners into the Heroes Latinos to raise money for St. Jude, all the while creating new champions for children, says Matilde's cousin, Cecilia Pelayo, who is part of the group.



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## Vermont runner goes the extra mile – and more – for St. Jude kids

Once Sue Kessler started running, she didn't want to stop. She had run a marathon in all 50 states by her 40th birthday and 50 more before she turned 50. She'd already run 80 marathons – that's like running from Chicago to Los Angeles – before signing up to raise money for St. Jude with each stride. That was in 2016. Today, she's run more than 100 races and raised almost \$100,000 for St. Jude. [stjude.org/ussj](http://stjude.org/ussj)



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