



PHOTO BY KATIE TRAPP FOR THE CARY NEWS

Anne and Gary Stevens sell raffle tickets and collect contributions at the annual Pay It Forward Party Saturday night.

## Party is a way for family to give back

BY KATIE TRAPP  
CORRESPONDENT

About 200 people gathered for live music and free food at the MacGregor Downs pool Saturday night. But this wasn't a typical pool party — it was what has become an annual fundraiser for a local non-profit foundation, Pay It Forward.

Pay It Forward raises money for area cancer patients who are financially in need. It all began when Jill Wolford, a Cary resident, was diagnosed with breast cancer in 1999. A young mother, she battled the disease for nine months and finally won.

She and her husband, Eric, who both work for GlaxoSmithKline in Research Triangle Park, were so overwhelmed with the help and support they received from friends and family during her treatments, that they wanted to give back. The foundation took the same name as a recent movie about doing good deeds for others.

"We found that the best way to help us was to help others in need," Eric said during the party. "Our best party was [our first], when we passed around buckets and asked everyone to just give what they could," he said.

That first party was a backyard barbecue with 75 people — and they collected \$724. It all went to a single mom who had lost her job and needed money to buy food and medication. Last year, the foundation added a raffle and a live band and made \$6,413. This time they were able to help out 14 cancer patients in need.

Expanding the party a bit more

this year, they held it at a larger venue, got personal and corporate sponsors and asked everyone to bring a friend. They advertised the event through mass e-mailing.

Also new from last year is how the group became an official non-profit organization. The foundation now has a board, complete with an oncologist, Maha Elkordy of Raleigh Hematology and Oncology.

"My role is to help distribute funds and educate the people here," said Elkordy, who treated Jill during her illness.

"She's my heaven on Earth, the next best thing to God ... she saved my life," Jill said of Elkordy.

Some guests said they enjoy Pay It Forward's parties compared to some other fundraisers. "This one is more informal and a lot more personal," said Betsy Pitkin, the Wolfords' next-door neighbor.

In the midst of the laid-back party atmosphere, there were a few easels informing the guests about the foundation — and that was all guests needed to generously donate thousands of dollars in a matter of hours.

As of Sunday evening, the foundation had collected \$10,950, and expected to reach \$12,000 to \$13,000 by mid-week.

"Next year, I want to make \$20,000 and I think we'll do it," Jill said. "When you know you can help other people, it's just the biggest high in the world."

To make a contribution, make checks payable to the Pay It Forward Foundation, P.O. Box 1364, Cary, NC 27512.