

# Paying It Forward: The Caring Community Foundation

By *Chris Matton*

**T**errible circumstances often bring out the best in us. In 1999, Jill and Eric Wolford faced terrible circumstances as Jill received treatment for stage 3 breast cancer. Friends, neighbors and complete strangers eased the Wolford family's days in many ways. Some provided child care for the two Wolford children, while others simply mowed the lawn. Unlike most who would have limited their thanks to written notes, Jill and Eric chose to "pay it forward" to help others.

Jill and Eric hosted a backyard barbecue in their Cary neighborhood in June 2001, to celebrate Jill's recovery. They explained to the party-goers the challenges that cancer imposes on those afflicted with the disease, including financial difficulties. Insurance frequently covers medical expenses, but fails to cover living expenses. Many with cancer struggle to meet everyday expenses such as the mortgage, utilities, and transportation when wrestling with cancer.

Once again, Jill and Eric's friends

responded. They dropped \$724 in a bucket that passed around the party. Jill and Eric brought the proceeds to Jill's oncologist and asked her to give the funds to a needy patient. Within days, Jill and Eric received a letter from a very grateful patient who was able to pay for her prescription—and had her spirits lifted.

Inspired by the impact that their effort brought to the life of one cancer patient, Jill and Eric launched The Caring Community Foundation, Inc. The friends, coworkers, and neighbors who helped a young Cary mother get beyond cancer formed the nucleus of the Foundation, which has no paid employees.

The Foundation today is a 501(c)(3) charitable organization that provides financial support to cancer patients in need. The Foundation has established relationships with social workers at clinics and hospitals in Raleigh, Durham, Cary, and Chapel Hill who help identify patients with financial challenges. When the Foundation receives a request from the network of social workers,

the Foundation expeditiously provides assistance with expenses such as rent, utilities, food, prescription medications, nutritional supplements, and other items that become even more difficult to manage in the face of cancer treatment. In recent months, for example, the Foundation has helped: a 25-year-old mother diagnosed with non-Hodgkins lymphoma who needed help to pay for her security deposit; and a 72-year-old woman receiving chemotherapy and radiation who was unable to pay a month of rent.

Since the original backyard barbecue in Cary, the Foundation's "Pay It Forward" party has grown to include live music, raffles, door prizes, and private and corporate contributions. The Foundation now depends upon the generosity of attendees and corporate sponsors to assist the Foundation to help cancer patients in need. To date, the Foundation has raised more than \$300,000 and has helped more than 400 local cancer patients.

The Foundation will hold its annual



"Pay It Forward" event at the Crabtree Marriott on Saturday, September 15, 2007, at 7:00 p.m. For more information about the Foundation and the "Pay It Forward" party, as well as other ways that you can help, please see [www.caringcommunity-foundation.org](http://www.caringcommunity-foundation.org). *h&h*

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