

# Help for cancer patient comes full circle

Charity sends money and goodwill to strangers

By VICKI CHENG, Staff Writer

CARY -- Kathy Goldston was trying to snuff out her breast cancer at Cary Oncology one day last summer. She had just gotten an infusion of chemotherapy drugs, which always left her extraordinarily tired.

Then, out of the blue, her doctor handed her an envelope. In it was a check for \$1,000.

The people at something called the Pay It Forward Foundation thought she could use it. Goldston, a single mother, had just been laid off from her job. She hadn't asked for the money, but she sure could use it to help pay the rent and utilities.

For Goldston, the check represented more than financial aid. It was moral support.

"You're in the middle of going through treatment," the Cary resident said. "You have breast cancer, and you have a child you want to live to raise. ... It strengthened my resolve to keep fighting. It helped me to know I had human beings that were behind me and supported me in any way they possibly could. Perfect strangers. People I didn't know."

On Saturday, the annual Pay It Forward party takes place at the MacGregor Downs Country Club in Cary. Every year since 2001, friends and neighbors of one Cary couple -- Jill and Eric Wolford -- have formed the nucleus of a charity with a mission to help strangers in need. Its philosophy is similar to the one in the 2000 film about a boy who comes up with a pyramid scheme of goodwill: You do something that helps someone. Then that person pays it forward by helping others.

In 1999, Jill Wolford was diagnosed with breast cancer. Her greatest fear was that she would die and leave her children, then 2 years old and 10 months old. She embarked on an aggressive treatment plan, involving chemotherapy, a stem cell transplant, radiation therapy, two mastectomies and a hysterectomy.

"Every day that I got up was tough," she said. "That was a total out-of-body experience."

As word spread about her condition, friends and acquaintances -- some of them almost strangers -- pitched in with meals and offers to baby-sit. They mowed the grass. They did the shopping. They drove Wolford to her chemotherapy treatments. The family returned from a trip to Indiana and found that someone had finished Eric Wolford's project of taking down the deck outside.

## Details

WHAT: Pay It Forward Foundation fund-raising event.

WHERE: MacGregor Downs Country Club, 430 St. Andrews Lane, Cary.

WHEN: 7 p.m. Saturday.

RSVP: [PIFFoundation@nc.rr.com](mailto:PIFFoundation@nc.rr.com).

TO CONTRIBUTE: Send donations to the Pay It Forward Foundation, P.O. Box 1364, Cary, N.C., 27512. The foundation's name will change soon to The Caring Community Foundation, to avoid confusion with other charities also named Pay It Forward.

"Stories would come back to us about people standing up in church, saying a prayer for Jill -- people we didn't know," he said.

So in June 2001, after Jill was cancer-free, the Wolfords threw a party in their back yard to thank everyone. It was Eric's idea to pass around a bucket to help some other poor soul fighting cancer. They raised \$724 that day and delivered the money to Jill's oncologist, so that she could donate it to a patient in need.

The recipient was a single mother on disability with terminal breast cancer. "I have cried for several hours because this has touched my heart more than anything I have ever known," she wrote on pink stationery. "Please know you have eased my fears of how I will pay for my prescriptions and treatment this month. You have also given me a great sense of faith in people! You have also given me a new strength and courage to go forth and not to worry about money because God and people like you will always be close at hand!"

### **Helping more and more**

The letter strengthened the Wolfords' resolve to help more people. They heard that the woman had used the money to pay for living expenses, but there was enough left over to take her son to a basketball game. A year later, the Wolfords read her obituary in the newspaper.

The \$724 "couldn't change the course of her life, but it changed the quality of her life," Jill Wolford said.

In 2002, the party raised more than \$6,400, enough to help 14 patients. In 2003, when Pay It Forward became a 501 (c) 3 nonprofit organization, the foundation raised more than \$30,000 to help 30 Triangle patients. This year's goal is \$50,000, to be distributed at Triangle hospitals, cancer centers and clinics.

"The coolest thing about it all is, we will never know these people," Jill Wolford said. "We will have an impact, though, on their lives. It kind of restores your faith in humanity. It has for me, anyway."

Jim Healy will never forget the day his daughter-in-law, Goldston, received the \$1,000 check.

"I was, to be honest with you, absolutely shocked," Healy said. "Because people just don't do that."

He did some detective work and tracked down the Wolfords. Then Healy decided to pay it forward. He persuaded clients at his company's annual golf tournament to play a charity hole for the organization.

"When I get up and talk about what Jill is doing, and how it's directly impacting people right here where we live, guys who used to moan about giving me two or three bucks are giving me twenties," he said. "So it's contagious."

Jill Wolford sees Healy's contribution as a bit of karma.

"This is it," she said. "This is the full circle. It has worked."