

Honoring his mother, he helps kids with cancer

**Kristin Lukowski of The Michigan Catholic
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Grosse Pointe Woods — It was two years ago that Gary and Danalee Herman bought their dream home, but because they hadn't sold their previous house they were managing two house payments.

A month later, Danalee went to the doctor because she thought her lingering cough was persistent bronchitis. Danalee, who had never smoked, was diagnosed with lung cancer.

So began her "ordeal," as she calls it, of treatment and trying to manage family and life as she, her husband, and their three children knew it. She started treatment, and as the bills started coming in from the extras not covered by Gary's insurance, she and Gary started to worry about how to keep their two youngest children at St. Joan of Arc School in St. Clair Shores — to keep their "roots in the right direction," as Gary says.

"We knew we would never take them out of there," she says. But the tuition bill was another big one in the growing pile that was worrying the couple.

Through a friend of a friend, the Hermans heard about the Rosemary A. Hockney Foundation, a nonprofit agency that helps Michigan families with children affected by cancer. They applied for a tuition grant and received funds for this school year for Nick, an eighth-grader, and Ciara, a fourth-grader. (Older son Spencer attends Grosse Pointe North High School.)

Danalee says having the kids' tuition paid for was a "huge relief." Nick and Ciara were glad to stay at St. Joan of Arc.

"It's important to stay around friends," Nick says. "I didn't want to go to another school."

Michael Hockney, of the Hockney Foundation, explains that the organization helps keep children in Catholic education, as well as provides aid grants, which helps families with house or car payments, prescriptions, food, or funeral expenses. He says there are many unexpected costs associated with fighting cancer, and it's not unheard of for families to spend their entire life savings on treatments.

"Cancer can take a middle-class family and turn it on its head," he says.

The foundation, in its third year, has provided more than \$100,000 to 31 families, and free services to many more, Hockney says.

He founded the agency in honor of his mother, Rosemary, a former Sister of St. Joseph nun who met her future husband, Richard, a seminary student, before she took her final vows. She raised eight children and sent them all to St. Benedict School in Highland Park. She also worked at St. Benedict for many years as a bookkeeper, and later at Guardian Angels in Clawson.

"Her faith played a large role in her life," he says. "She was an amazing woman."

He remembers that the many times his mother helped families; she did it without wanting any attention for it. "It was always out of the kindness of her heart," he says. "That's just how she lived her life."

Rosemary Hockney was diagnosed with colorectal cancer in early 2003, and died in June 2004 at age 71. After her death, Michael Hockney almost immediately began working on the foundation to honor her memory; he founded it with Robin Sanderson, the sister of his mother's best friend, who had lost her own mother to cancer a few years before.

To help raise the funds to assist families and children affected by cancer, the Hockney Foundation is hosting its biggest annual fundraiser, the Night of Hope, later this month. Joe and Coleen Giniel, who lost their 4-year-old son Jack to cancer in November, are scheduled to be guest speakers at this year's A Night of Hope.

Coleen Giniel explains although the family could afford Jack's treatment, they weren't doing any of the extra things families often do. Through the foundation's ties with the Detroit sports teams, the Giniels got to go to a Tigers game, and Jack got to meet some of the players.

"It was fantastic for the kids," she says. "It was nice to get out and experience something fun."

The foundation also donated items for a fundraiser for her son, dubbed "Jacktoberfest," and built a clubhouse in the backyard, named in Jack's honor. The family, which includes sons Ryan, 7, and Kevin, 4, Jack's twin, lives in Troy and attends St. Anastasia Parish.

For the Hermans, they also appreciate how involved the Hockney Foundation has been involved in their life. Michael Hockney keeps in regular touch with them, and reminds them to let him know if they need help.

"They're there to help you," Gary Herman says. "It's more like a family member than an organization."

Danalee Herman is continuing her treatment, trying out some experimental methods, but continues teaching religious education at St. Joan of Arc, working as a legal secretary out of her home, and attending daily Mass. Both she and Gary credit their faith with helping them get through the trials so far.

Working on the foundation has also affected the faith of Michael Hockney, he says. "I think you take so many things for granted until your life is personally affected," he says. "It's been a blessing. It puts life in perspective."

Hockney, 40, runs the foundation out of his Macomb Township home, and says it takes a "tremendous" amount of time from his family and his day job as a sales manager. He credits much of the success to his wife Angela and her support; the couple also has a son, Shane, 8, who attends St. Thecla School, the family's home parish.

He believes his mom would be proud of his work. "She'd be thrilled that so many people were being helped," he says.

A Night of Hope

For: Rosemary A. Hockney Foundation, which provides assistance to families whose children are affected by cancer, either their own or a family member's.

When: April 21, 6 p.m. to midnight.

Where: Zuccaro Banquet Center, 46601 N. Gratiot Ave., Chesterfield Township.

Cost: Donations taken at the door.

RSVP: To Robin Sanderson at (586) 226-3146 or by e-mail.

More info: To make a donation, or for a grant request form, visit www.rosehockneyfoundation.com or call (586) 783-7738.