

Volunteer effort benefits pediatric cancer patients

BY KEVIN MERTZ
Staff writer

DANVILLE — Inspired by a 9-year-old cancer patient, a Geisinger pediatrician founded an all-volunteer organization which has dolled out nearly \$100,000 over the past two years to the families of children battling cancer.

“ThinkBIG came about, just recognizing there wasn’t any financial support for pediatric cancer patients in our area... who are treated at Geisinger,” Dr. Colby Wesner, ThinkBIG founder, said. “Other hospital systems have funds that help support those patient populations. There was a void for the families that go through this in our region. We wanted to help fill that void.”

He stressed that ThinkBIG is an independent 501c3 nonprofit organization and is not operated or managed by the Geisinger Health System.

“We define ourselves as wanting to help Geisinger patients, but we are not part of the Geisinger Health System or the Janet Weis Children’s Hospital,” Wesner said.

The idea for ThinkBIG was sparked in 2012 as Wesner was completing his pediatric residency at Geisinger. He began treating 9-year-old Carmine Monacelli.

“He was a boy from the Scranton area that had a form of pediatric bone cancer,” Wesner said.

“He had a very mature sense



Photo provided by Dr. Colby Wesner
Dr. Colby Wesner with Carmine Monacelli, a 9-year-old cancer patient who inspired him to start ThinkBIG. The name for the organization was drawn from Monacelli’s spirit of always dreaming big. Monacelli has since passed away.

of community service and philanthropy and a positive outlook,” he continued. “He was always thinking of what he wanted to be when he grew up... Every time you took care of him, he always wanted to be something different.”

Monacelli’s biggest dream was to become the first U.S.-born pope. He passed away a short time after being diagnosed with cancer.

Because Monacelli was always thinking big about what he wanted to do with his life, Wesner said that spirit sparked the name of his organization. Monacelli’s mother is one of 15 volunteers who now serve on ThinkBIG’s board of direc-

tors. Wesner credits the Milton law firm of Baldwin and Baldwin with helping to write ThinkBIG’s articles of incorporation and bi-laws that needed to be submitted to Pennsylvania as part of the process of becoming a nonprofit organization.

“We had other volunteers with strong accounting backgrounds help us file the paperwork to get our 501c3 status,” Wesner continued. “Other lawyers helped us create policies and procedures.”

The organization officially launched in 2014 after receiving 501c3 nonprofit status.

“We define ourselves as an

organization that wants to support pediatric cancer patients and their families who are treated at the Janet Weis Children’s Hospital at Geisinger Medical Center,” Wesner said. “We also help families from the area who may need more advanced pediatric (cancer) care.”

Many of the families helped by the organization are referred by social workers at the Janet Weis Children’s Hospital.

“So far we’ve been able to help exactly 47 unique families,” Wesner said. “We’re about \$20 short of giving out \$100,000.”

He offered thanks to every-

one who has volunteered with or contributed to ThinkBIG.

“Every fundraised dollar goes a long way for a young organization,” Wesner said. “We’re not paying the salaries of providers. We are not paying for renovations to the children’s hospital... Our primary goal is to help alleviate financial stress for pediatric cancer patients in our area.”

For more information on ThinkBIG, visit www.thinkbig.org.

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Volunteer Briefs

TIME announces fundraising campaign

MILTON — The Improved Milton Experience (TIME) recently announced a campaign to help raise funds to support operating expenses associated with the Veterans Tribute and Memorial Park, located adjacent to the Milton Moose Family Center on South Front Street.

Since it was created in 2005, over 1,100 engraved bricks have been sold and placed along the walkway.

In addition to the fundraising effort, the sale of the bricks helps to cover expenses such as landscaping, insurance and the annual purchase of two 20 foot-by-30 foot flags to fly at the walkway. This past year, a maintenance and restoration project was completed on the 90-foot flag pole.

Each year, the site hosts ceremonies on Flag Day, Sept. 11 and Veterans Day.

Tax deductible contributions to the park can be sent to: The Improved Milton Experience, 139 S. Front St., Milton PA 17847.

Food bank seeking volunteers

LEWISBURG — The Eastern Union County Food Bank is seeking volunteers to assist with food distributions from 1:15 to 3:30 p.m. on the first and third Friday of each month at the food bank, located in the First Baptist Church at the corner of South Third and St. Louis streets, Lewisburg.

Volunteers are especially needed to help with distributions scheduled for Dec. 16, and Jan. 6.

For more information on volunteering, call 570-523-6898.

Santa to visit Kratzerville

KRATZERVILLE — Santa Claus will visit the Kratzerville Volunteer Fire Company from 6 to 8 p.m. Thursday. The fire company is located at 62 Fire Hall Road, just off of Route 204.

Children may share their Christmas wish lists with Santa. Boy Scout Troop 441 of Kratzerville will be accepting donations of toys for the Toys for Tots program.

Food will be available for order during Santa hours, including pizza, chicken fingers, cheeseburgers and fresh cut fries. The social hall will be non-smoking while Santa is visiting.

Extravaganza to raise funds

WATSONTOWN — The Warrior Run Area Fire Department 2016 Christmas Shopping Extravaganza will be held from 1 to 5 p.m. Sunday at the fire department’s social hall in Allenwood.

Proceeds benefit the fire department and the Watsonstown Police Department’s Welfare Fund.

Gift Card Bingo

NEW COLUMBIA — Gift Card Bingo will be held Sunday in the St. John’s UCC Fellowship Hall, 906 Old Route 15, New Columbia.

Doors open at 12:30 p.m., with an early bird at 1:45 and regular play starting at 2.

Tickets are \$20 in advance or \$25 at the door.

Food will be available for purchase.

Call 570-412-5127 or email stjohnsucc@ymail.com to reserve tickets.