

ECFVOICE

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE EMMANUEL CANCER FOUNDATION



THE FOUR MUSKETEERS: Megan and Her Family



Eleven-year-old Megan is learning to cook, do laundry and wash dishes.

This may not seem like a big deal, except that Megan is legally blind due to nerve damage from an inoperable brain tumor diagnosed when she was just three years old. Because the tumor is recurring, and because it can't be removed

without causing significant paralysis, Megan has to endure year-long regimens of chemo. She has already gone through four; the treatment stabilizes the tumor, but doesn't shrink it, and more chemotherapy would only damage her kidneys.

“Megan is the strongest person I know,” says her mom Toni. “She is very selfless. When she was in the hospital getting treatment, she worried about me being comfortable sleeping.”

Megan loves school, learning braille and any kind of vehicle. Her mom says little things make Megan happy, like a hug. Though Megan walks with a cane and tires easily, she loves swimming in the local YMCA pool. “The first time Megan swam in the pool was the first time since her diagnosis that she was just a kid.” Megan has two sisters, 13-year-old Victoria and 9-year-old Mackenzie. They read to Megan, help her with homework, and know when she is having a seizure. “I call our family the four musketeers,” says Toni, a single mother who is

disabled due to a fall on ice which herniated several discs in her back. She is not able to work, and her hands go numb if she drives longer than 15 minutes. Yet she takes Megan to every doctor's appointment, every MRI. She stays with her during every grueling hospital stay.

“When I found out Megan had cancer, I felt like my whole world had crashed to a halt.” She first contacted ECF in 2015. “From the moment I reached out they were there for me. Now, three years later, they continue to walk this journey by my side.” Toni discovered that there are so many more issues than just the illness—emotional strain, exhaustion, financial stress with bills piling up. ECF provides Toni with monthly food donations, help with rent, and birthday gifts and party supplies for all three daughters. “The organization's holiday wish list allowed me to put presents under the tree,” said Toni, while ECF's holiday party is a chance for Megan to “stop thinking about her illness and instead just laugh and smile and enjoy the company of friends dealing with the same issues.”



Toni has been doing public speaking for ECF to tell her family's story, which moved the crowd to tears at the Eastern Region's recent Crystal Gala fundraising event. “It is very therapeutic to give back and put a face on the situation, from a Mom's perspective.” Megan spoke too, which made her mother very proud. “It is truly a blessing not to have to fight this fight alone,” she says. “We are struggling, but the kids have all the love they could want.”

reflections

FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



SOMEONE ONCE SAID:

"Coming together is a beginning; keeping together is progress; working together is success."

I was thinking, not too long ago, about how interesting our tiny (but mighty) staff is. We are all very different people, from varying walks of life, but with one common thread that brings us together — ECF.

It seems like each of us, no matter where we began our careers, always felt inspired by causes and driven to give back to the community. Much like the people featured in the stories in this edition of *ECF Voice*. Staff, board members, volunteers – even families. Families whose lives have been seriously shaken by a pediatric cancer diagnosis, and that felt inspired to 'give back' to ECF. It is a beautiful thing to witness.

People like you exemplify the idea of 'paying it forward.' You give back to ECF so often, whether by volunteering your time, donating food, paying a family's bill, or by taking the time to read this and spread the word about ECF, just to name a few. You share our passion for service and our need to help others.

I'd like to give back something to you...our *ECF Voice* readers. I'd like to give you peace of mind that what you do for ECF, in whatever capacity you do it, and for whatever reason it is that inspires you, **you are making a difference**. You are lightening the load for families and children in their time of need. Thank you.

JOANN PASSANTINO

"Think of giving not as a duty but as a privilege."

—JOHN D. ROCKEFELLER, JR.

meet a BOARD MEMBER:

Mike Walsh

MIKE WALSH'S mother gave him some good advice while growing up:

"Don't ever take yourself too seriously."

"Have pride in who you are and what you do."

"You are not better or worse than anyone else."



Mike has lived his life accordingly ever since.

His widowed mom raised Mike and his brothers on her own in Elizabeth, NJ, becoming a successful business woman and sending all her kids to college. Mike graduated from Seton Hall University, followed by a Master's Degree from the Institute of Business and Finance. His family emphasized education, good works, and giving back. Mike says his mom would always "find the poorest guy in the crowd and try to help him."

Mike was introduced to ECF in 1992 by co-founder Joe Vizzoni and immediately got involved in organizing the first golf outing. Mike loved golf and wanted to help—he was moved by the stories of ECF families that he heard at fundraising dinners. "Their speeches went straight to my heart," says Mike. He served on the ECF board of trustees from 1997 to 2005, including as Board President. "Board members are volunteers," says Mike. "But we are no more important, or probably less important, than those volunteers who deliver gifts and groceries directly to the families." Though he left the board for a number of years to focus on work and other charities, when Executive Director Joann Passantino asked him to come back, he unequivocally said yes! "In my heart I never truly left ECF."

Mike leads his own Ameriprise financial planning office – The Walsh Group – and has been married to his wife Bridget for 33 years. "She was dumb enough to say yes and has been suffering ever since," Mike says. They live in Tewksbury but also have a home in Naples, Florida.

Like his mother, Mike has some great advice: "Do the best you can in life" and "Help people who need it." Mike says, "Why not make other people a little happier. That comes down to what ECF is all about."



CREATE YOUR CHARITABLE LEGACY

A simple, flexible and versatile way to ensure ECF can continue our work for years to come is a gift in your will or living trust, known as a **CHARITABLE BEQUEST**. Please consider including a bequest to ECF in your estate plan.

For more information, call (908) 322-4323 ext. 15.

voices FROM THE REGIONAL CENTERS

SOUTHERN REGION



While Sherice was undergoing chemotherapy for a cancerous ovarian tumor at age 12, she and her family were living in a motel. A few months ago, at age 13, Sherice was diagnosed with leukemia, reportedly caused by her cancer treatments. She was in a battle for her life and faced a harrowing bone marrow transplant, with her mom as the donor. They knew they couldn't get through this in a motel room. So the family successfully raised enough money through a GoFundMe page to get their own apartment. ECF provided emotional support through their rollercoaster experience, as well as monthly food deliveries, coverage of several months' rent, gift cards, Easter baskets, and birthday boxes. A Facebook post about Sherice's family helped bring in donations for them as well as other ECF families. We are grateful to the family for sharing their story, and ECF will continue to be there for them every step of their journey.

EASTERN REGION



The work we do at ECF not only inspires us, our donors, sponsors and volunteers, but also inspires some of our very special ECF kids. This year McKenzie was asked to be a speaker at our Crystal Gala. Without hesitation she agreed and also offered to sing. McKenzie's hearing is damaged from the very rare cancer she has — squamous cell carcinoma. But she did not let this get in the way of her love of music and her dreams of being a theater major, which she currently is, at Wagner College in Staten Island. Her moving story was followed by a beautiful performance of the song *Warrior*. She touched every single person in the room. We are so lucky to have such wonderful children and families that are willing to give back to us in any possible way.

NORTHERN REGION



Jordan is a vivacious 10-year-old who was diagnosed with acute lymphoblastic leukemia three years ago. While her aggressive blood cancer had a large emotional impact, the family also struggled financially. ECF provided both emotional and financial resources to help the family get through their difficult time. Today Jordan is doing well and loves to give back to ECF. She created a drawing that we have used on ECF holiday cards and thank you plaques, organized a coin drive fund raiser at her school and recently participated in our new ECF video. We honored Jordan at our annual Bash this past March where she beautifully performed the song *Scars to Your Beautiful*. She is such an inspiration to us!

CENTRAL REGION



Katrina was diagnosed with leukemia in June 2015, a month after her 10th birthday. A bright and articulate young woman, Katrina has been resilient in coping with the diagnosis and treatment and has been supported throughout by her loving parents and extended family. Because Katrina's cancer was so aggressive, she initially required intensive treatment that caused significant side effects, adding to the family's stress. ECF helped with supportive counseling for Katrina and her parents, monthly delivery of groceries, and covering the cost of meals when Katrina's parents stayed with her at the hospital. ECF also got the family four new tires for their car and found a source to offer them assistance with their mortgage payment. Fortunately, Katrina's treatment was successful, and she was able to "graduate" to outpatient chemotherapy—her final session was in February! Katrina's strength is an inspiration to her family and friends, and she and her parents are looking forward to reaching out to other families in need through a future ECF Facebook campaign.

ECF IS GRATEFUL TO THE FOLLOWING FOUNDATIONS AND CORPORATIONS THAT PROVIDED RECENT GRANT SUPPORT:

Janssen Biotech, Inc. • Select Equity Group Foundation • Innovation Data Processing • New York Community Trust • Investors Foundation
New Jersey Multiple Listing Service, Inc. • Rite Aid Foundation • E.J. Grassmann Trust • Wawa, Inc. • Merrick Family Foundation • The Arnold A. Schwartz Foundation • Provident Bank Foundation • Thomas and Mary Ann Tizzio Foundation • The Hinman Foundation • The Meta C. Mergott Foundation • JENNJOE Fund of the Community Foundation of NJ • Bristol-Myers Squibb Company • Lerch Family Foundation • Joseph Lapinski Foundation • The Westfield Foundation • Samantha Lorene Calafiore Memorial Fund • Thomas H. Hamilton Foundation • St. Elizabeth's Church Woman's Club of Ridgewood • MGN Foundation **THANK YOU!!**

AMY & AVERY



ECF Caseworker Amy stopped by to visit Avery and her family at the same time a "Birthday Box" from ECF was delivered by a volunteer. Amy got to see Avery open the box filled with plates, napkins, cake mix, decorations — everything she needs for a birthday celebration, including a ticket for iPlay America!

from sesame street TO ECF

BOB McGRATH narrated the **Emmanuel Cancer Foundation's** first video, but that is not what he is famous for. Most people know him from the original cast of *Sesame Street*, which he joined in 1969 and stayed for 45 years. He initially passed up an opportunity to audition for the show, which came to his attention during a chance meeting with a college friend in front of Carnegie Hall. But a subsequent call from Sesame Workshop led him to meet a then unknown Jim Henson and, amazed by the newly created Muppets, Bob eagerly agreed to audition.....and the rest is history!

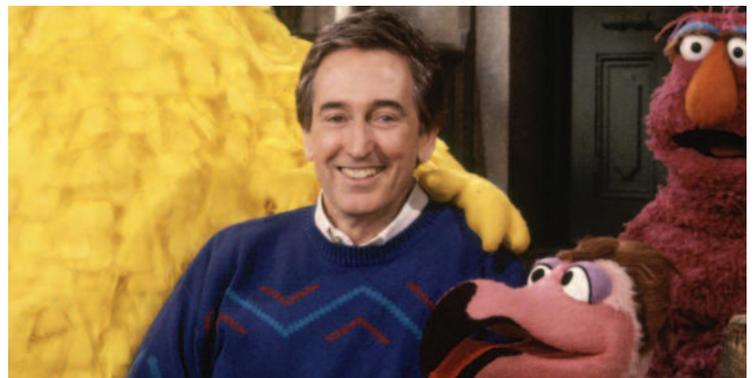


Over the past five decades, Bob has performed a wide variety of family, educational, and holiday concerts, often inviting local children to sing and dance in his productions. As a lifelong advocate for children, Bob has participated in countless telethons and other fundraising events. Bob got involved with ECF when he met founders Joe and Sue Vizzoni and was moved by their son Emmanuel's story. Bob started performing interactive musical shows at ECF's family holiday party. "It made the kids happy," said Bob, "if even for a short while." He stayed involved with ECF for more than 15 years.

Last year, Bob was diagnosed with cancer and had 50 radiation treatments over a few weeks. He got to know the other patients, some of whom were children. "Chemo devastates them. You see them come in happy and playful and leave so tired and sick looking," Bob says. "You never forget that." He praised ECF for the close bonds the caseworkers have with the families, that they are there whenever the families need to talk and to help solve daily problems. "ECF steps in and says call me anytime day or night," says Bob. "Doctors can't help you when you need a new microwave," he added. "ECF fills the gap between the hospital and the home."

Bob has been married to his wife Ann for 56 years; they have five children and eight grandchildren. Though semi-retired, he still performs and has a busy recording company. In April he put together a special concert of classic Sesame Street songs and sing-a-longs that he performed with the United States Marine Band. In his "spare" time he does yoga and just took up recumbent biking. Bob and his wife recently moved to Norwood, after 50 years of living in Teaneck.

Growing up on an Illinois farm, Bob was taught the importance of neighbors helping neighbors, which defined his life focus of helping children. "Go to the ECF website and read the stories and get to know the kids," he says. "That will help you understand." **Thank you Bob!** <http://www.bobmcgrath.com/>



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