

Four Hundred Dollars and a Dream

You don't have to be rich to make a huge difference in people's lives. That's something that Bob Walsh and his wife, Christina, instinctively knew when they first talked about what has become the **Christina S. Walsh Breast Cancer Foundation.**

Founded soon after Christina succumbed to breast cancer in August 2004, the organization provides financial support to those with cancer who are underinsured by helping to pay for medications and tests not covered by insurance. Additionally, the Foundation supplies amenities, such as specially designed camisoles for mastectomy patients, and pays for their families' meals, hotel accommodations, transportation, and parking at the hospital—all to ease their financial burden.

"We are so terribly grateful for this program," said Anne Pearce, the wife of a cancer patient who has been admitted to the University Medical Center at Princeton (UMCP) for several long stays, as well as for outpatient chemotherapy treatment. "I never know when we will be here overnight, or even longer." Wendy Luca, MSN, RN, OCN, Nurse Manager of the Oncology Unit, has seen the Walsh Foundation grow since its very beginning. "When I give out the camisoles or stamp a parking pass, I often say, 'Do you know how this program started?' and try to give them some history about Christina and Bob, and how the fund started. I hope that it will inspire others," she said.

For Bob, it's a way to keep celebrating Christina's life, which ended when she was just 32 and their daughter was 3.

How did the idea for the foundation come about?

We knew Christina's prognosis but wanted to take one last family trip to Florida. On our last day there, her breathing was so hard. We were forced to hire a medical jet—at a cost of \$11,000—to take her back to New Jersey, as the regular airlines couldn't accommodate the oxygen she required. Our friends and family got together and raised money to pay for it. After the bill was settled, we had \$400 left over. She and I talked about how wonderful it would be if we could help relieve others from cancer's financial burden. Christina passed away in August, and in October we held our first fundraiser for the Christina S. Walsh Breast Cancer Foundation to start doing just that.

How much has been raised?

We're a mom-and-pop operation. A small, very dedicated group of people have held up to five fundraisers a year, with most of the supplies, entertainment, and services being donated to us. Although there is no cure for breast cancer yet, we try to make our fundraisers a positive experience and let people know we are raising money "to do good."

Over the past five years, I think we've raised \$250,000. I know we are making it a little easier for people. The letters and phone calls I get from people saying thank you are very touching, almost overwhelming.

We support an Oncology Fund at UMCP, the Patient Relief Fund at the Cancer Institute of New Jersey, the Breast Cancer Resource Center, and the Christina S. Walsh Breast Cancer Foundation Patient Support Fund. All people have to do is call us—and so far, we've never had to turn anyone away. ■



Pictured above: Bob Walsh and his daughter with a photograph of Christina, whose memory they honor through their work for other cancer patients.