

# ASBURY PARK PRESS

November 22, 2010

**SURVIVOR:** Teen, pals plan benefit Dance-A-Thon

## 'BFFs' Aid Families Facing Cancer

By: Alesha Williams Boyd

MARLBORO — While she was hospitalized for weeks at a time with bone cancer, there were times when the only contact 15-year-old Jackie Ceraolo had with friends was through video chat on a donated Apple laptop.

The computer, along with other gifts from the Beauty Foundation for Women's Cancer Care of Red Bank, helped Jackie through the rough months. And they were rough: 27 rounds of chemotherapy, a limb-salvage surgery to replace her femur with a titanium rod and two lung surgeries, she and her mother Lori said.

When she had completed her final osteosarcoma treatment, she was greeted by a bubble-gum pink Hummer limousine carrying all her BFFs, courtesy of the foundation, said Lori Ceraolo, a Beauty Foundation board member.

"I could cry just thinking about it," Lori Ceraolo said. "I firmly believe in my heart the reason she entered into treatment and finished and, thinking back to when she was just 90 pounds, today looks just like every other kid is because of these foundations that provided hope and help and fun things to do all the time."

Today, Jackie, now cancer-free for a year, is paying it forward with another BFF crew — that is, members of the Beauty Foundation Friends. The grassroots group of Monmouth County teens joined forces to aid other families facing cancer diagnoses.

### IF YOU GO

BFF will host its Dance-A-Thon Party from 7:30 to 11 p.m. Friday at Dance Attitudes, 6 Timber Lane in Marlboro. Visit [www.firstgiving.com/bffdanceathon](http://www.firstgiving.com/bffdanceathon) to register.

"You don't always see people our age helping out with important things like this. . . . It makes you so grateful," Jackie said. "I hope it helps them as much as it helped me."

Just a month after the group's launch, BFF has raised more than \$22,000 toward the Raise the Roof Dance-A-Thon Party Friday at Dance Attitudes, Marlboro. The funds will support the Beauty Foundation and the Ashley Lauren Foundation of Colts Neck. The Red Bank group provides groceries, transportation, wigs and other necessities and wish-list items for families battling cancer diagnoses. The Colts Neck foundation provides similar support for young people with cancer.

Ceraolo launched the idea a month ago for the foundation along with her brother, Kyle, 12, Carly and Nicole Berns, 14 and 11, and Ben and Erica Palmieri, 14 and 12, all of Marlboro.

The teens have turned to Facebook, handing out fliers at school and appearances on local radio stations to get the word out about their effort.

And the idea of raising the roof while raising funds for a good cause has caused a bit of buzz among area teens. More than 110 students and parents, including members of the Marlboro High School varsity football team, turned up on the Berns' family's doorstep for a recent group meeting to

hear how they could help, Carly Berns said.

Area businesses also are kicking in support: Dinner will be catered by LaPiazza of Marlboro and Mixed Greens & Grill of Manalapan, and Unique Musique of Marlboro will provide entertainment. All businesses, including Dance Attitudes, donated their services, according to BFF.

Attendees ages 11 to 18 are invited to raise donations and dance as long as they can.

"Everyone likes to dance," said Carly, a dancer with a local team, who said her grandmother also is a cancer survivor. "It's a great way to have fun. Even though the cause is for something really serious, we want them to be able to have fun as a reward for raising money."

Raising the roof is just the beginning. The teens are already at work on their next project: an adopt-a-family program in which individuals, families and businesses will help families dealing with cancer by providing items on that family's holiday wish list.

Marissa Levine, 12, whose brother, Mark, died of osteosarcoma in May, said she plans to help in any way she can. She's already raised \$1,500 for BFF in her effort to return some of the joy her brother was given in his last months.

The Ashley Lauren Foundation helped grant Mark his ultimate wish, she said: Louie, the 5-year-old bichon-Maltese poodle he had for the last 2 1/2 weeks of his life.

"I know my brother needed that — the extra loving and bonding, knowing other people are there for him," Marissa Levine said. "Even though it didn't turn out like we would have hoped, he was at peace. . . . I think he would be really happy with what we're doing."