Local Family Donates in Daughter's Memory

Laura Govatos was a beloved daughter, friend and employee

When parents lose a child, no matter at what age, the loss is always heartbreakingly present. Judy Govatos and George Govatos of Wilmington grieve every day for their daughter Laura, who died at age 31 nearly 10 years ago. Their consolation is in knowing the joy Laura brought to everyone she knew. As they thought about her legacy of loving kindness, the Govatos family decided to remind others of its rareness and importance by making a gift to Nemours/Alfred I. duPont Hospital for Children to support the Family Resource Center, in Laura's name.

Laura Govatos

At the time of her death in 2004, Laura was a month away from being married. She was happily employed as the executive assistant to duPont Hospital orthopedic surgeon William Mackenzie, MD. She had been day manager at the Ronald McDonald House of Delaware and it was in the service of children and families that she found her true calling.

"Laura was an incredible human being," said Dr. Mackenzie. "She treated everyone equally. She made everyone feel important."

A rare illness claimed Laura's life. TTP — thrombotic thrombocytopenic purpura — is a blood disorder in which clots form in small blood vessels throughout the body. The clots can cause catastrophic internal bleeding, which happened in Laura's case. Less than a week elapsed from the appearance of Laura's first symptoms to the time of her death. Judy Govatos calls TTP a cruel and horrible disease.

In December, the Govatos family donated $10,000 to the hospital in honor of Laura. "She would have loved this," said her mother. "She cared so much about the patients and families, and she would have approved of how the hospital is evolving with family-centered care." The donation is going towards the installment of televisions and video equipment in the Ronald McDonald House Family Room in the hospital's Family Resource Center. It is an area where families go to relax, do laundry, take a nap, do some work or reading. Intentionally apart from the clinical space, the center is comfortable, warmly lit and inviting. In addition to their gift to Nemours, the family has donated $4,000 to the TTP Foundation hoping that research will benefit others with the condition. The donations were made possible by the generous gifts of Laura's family and friends to her memorial fund.

At the check presentation, a crowd in the hospital's resource center listened appreciatively to anecdotes about Laura, related by her parents. After the ceremony, it seemed everyone had an anecdote of their own to share. The time Laura went to be with Dr. Mackenzie's wife when the family dog was dying, even though it was Laura's birthday and a large group was waiting for her at a restaurant. The time she went to the Saturday funeral of a 2-year-old boy in rural Pennsylvania, when others couldn't bear to go, feeling it would be "too sad." The time Laura managed the complex details of a foreign student's visa, assuring he could continue his medical training. Laura's treasure chest, a box of toys she kept beside her desk, from which she invited Orthopedics patients to choose.

One woman told Judy Govatos, years after Laura's death, that a pink purse from Laura's box was treasured by her college-age daughter. When the woman was separating things in her daughter's bedroom into "take along," "keep" and "toss" piles before she left for school, they came across the pink purse. Mom raised an eyebrow, and her daughter responded: "No, keep that. I'll never get rid of that. It's a forever thing." It was testimony to Laura's generosity and kindness at a time when the young woman was a scared little girl, facing the prospect of surgery and pain.

"Laura knew the hospital was a hard place for children to be. She tried very hard to make people feel better, to make them feel at home," said Judy Govatos. The family hopes their donation will further Laura's legacy of infusing hospital visits with friendly, home-like touches and genuine compassion.

Nemours is an internationally recognized children's health system that owns and operates the Nemours/Alfred I. duPont Hospital for Children in Wilmington, Del., and Nemours Children's Hospital in Orlando, Fla., along with outpatient facilities in six states, delivering pediatric primary, specialty and urgent care. Nemours also powers the world's most-visited website for information on the health of children and teens, KidsHealth.org and offers on-demand, online video patient visits through Nemours CareConnect.

Established as The Nemours Foundation through the legacy and philanthropy of Alfred I. duPont, Nemours provides pediatric clinical care, research, education, advocacy, and prevention programs to families in the communities it serves.

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