

## People & Places

# Party raises big money to help young cancer patients

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Wearing gold body paint and a gold bow on his head, **Rolando Valdes** explained that gold symbolizes the recent Childhood Cancer Awareness Month.

Valdes, 16 and a cancer survivor, volunteered at the recent 10th anniversary party for the Jessica June Children's Cancer Foundation at Vibe Las Olas in Fort Lauderdale. What started as a small cocktail party has evolved into a big party with more than 350 attendees raising more than \$90,000 for the foundation.

"It started growing and growing and turned out to be more than we anticipated," said **Sandra Muvdi**, founder and president. "They gave us this opportunity for this big milestone."

The nonprofit was started in 2004 by Muvdi after her daughter, 7, died of cancer. The foundation's mission is to provide emergency financial assistance for children fighting cancer to ensure access to basic necessities, as well as raise awareness.

Muvdi had originally canceled this year's party because she was battling breast cancer, but she is now done with treatments and



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At the Jessica June Children's Cancer Foundation's 10th anniversary party are, from left, Rolando Valdes, Sandra Muvdi, Rolando Valdes Jr. and Tamara Penaranda.

doing well, she said.

When sponsor Premier Beverage found out, they spearheaded planning the party, she said.

"When we found out she herself was battling this disease and was going to give up fundraising, we felt a need to make sure their charity was still in business," said **Katie Leibick**, spokeswoman for Premier Beverage.

The event featured live entertainment, dancing, a raffle, silent auction and more.

In honor of the foundation's 10th anniversary, Muvdi launched a campaign to raise \$200,000 that runs through the end of the

year.

"All funds go to the foundation. There is little overhead, free office space. Funds go to local families fighting pediatric cancer who are in crisis mode and need basic assistance for basic human needs," Muvdi said.

Valdes' mother, **Tamara Penaranda**, received financial assistance that helped her move when her son was battling cancer, she said. Valdes, who has been cancer-free from Ewing's sarcoma for a year and a half, volunteers regularly for the foundation because "they helped me so much," he said.

"It's a nice environment, and they are really nice to you, and you are giving back with the help they gave you," he said. "Also, [I like] helping with other children who went through what I went through when I was sick and giving back a little hope to those other children."

Muvdi said they have helped more than 2,500 children over the years.

"There is a really great need for the funds we raise; there is no other nonprofit that raises money for emergency funds in the tri-county area," she said.

For more information, visit [Jjccf.org](http://Jjccf.org).