

## FORT LAUDERDALE

# Event to benefit family of teen fighting cancer

■ Two charities are rallying around a Margate father caring for a daughter with cancer — and no money to pay the rent.

BY EILEEN SOLER

Special to The Miami Herald

Burly, hardworking Dave Blake picked up the pieces of a broken home a decade ago, when he was left with three kids, one paycheck and just enough money to cover the bills.

On Dec. 26, 2008, when the single dad's only daughter, Amanda, 15, was diagnosed with a rare form of osteosarcoma, a bone cancer, the chemical salesman quit his job and dedicated himself to saving his daughter.

"It's been a totally different life with doctor appointments, hospital stays, surgery, chemotherapy," Blake said. "I can't work and I never know where the rent will come from every month."

Blake, unemployed for seven months, his daughter and his two sons, David, 14, and Dylan, 11, face eviction nearly every 30 days.

"Still, Amanda keeps smiling," Blake said.

On Thursday, the Jessica June Children's Cancer Foundation and the Wasie Foundation will host a fundraiser to make the entire Blake family smile.

The event — Amanda, We Stand by You! — will offer cocktails, jazz music and gourmet finger foods at the Las Olas Grand Clubhouse. "More than any fundraiser in town right now, this one will truly be heartfelt because it will give a family a basic human necessity," said

Sandra Muvdi, founder of the Jessica June foundation.

Muvdi created the charity after the death of her only child, Jessica June, to leukemia at age 7 in 2003. The program provides monetary assistance to families that too easily can plunge into poverty during the treatment of a child with cancer.

"In order to take care of a child with cancer, a parent simply cannot work. There is no time," Muvdi said.

Blake said his family was typically blue collar before Amanda had cancer. An honor student, she was involved in music and theater at Coral Springs High School. Her brothers played for the Coral Springs Tackle Football Club. The family attended Sunday services at Calvary Chapel.

Normal life came to a halt during Amanda's first visit to Miami Children's Hospital in January.

Muvdi understands what that's like.

"I lost my only child... then I heard my calling to help other families. Now there is no turning back," Muvdi said.

The Wasie Foundation, under chief executive officer Gregg Sjoquist, also a board member of Muvdi's charity, is paying for the entire event, including drinks, entertainment, food and publicity. Every dollar from ticket sales (\$75) and donations will go to Blake.

Blake said Muvdi helped pay his March rent.

Later, WPLG-ABC 10 aired his story and another month of rent was paid.



## CANCER BATTLE:

Amanda Blake, 15, of Margate, and her father, Dave Blake, will be guests of honor at a fundraiser cocktail party.

## If you go

- What: Amanda, We Stand by You! fundraiser.
- Where: Las Olas Grand Clubhouse, 411 New River Dr., Fort Lauderdale.
- When: 6 to 8 p.m. Thursday.
- Cost: \$75.
- Information: 954-593-5603.

Meanwhile, Blake's family in South Carolina held a fundraiser-dance with help from a local Moose Lodge to help keep food on the table and a roof over their heads.

"Then I had to reach out again because of August's rent. I was at my wits end," Blake said.

And Amanda needs more treatment.

A large tumor on Amanda's left knee did not respond to the initial chemotherapy. Knee-replacement surgery in April did not stop the cancer's spread.

A new round of chemotherapy treatments is set to begin Monday.