

# Sun-Sentinel

{ Community News }

September 13, 2009

## Local teenage cancer patient has new hope

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Last Christmas, a diagnosis of an aggressive cancer led **Amanda Blake** to leave Coral Springs High in the middle of her freshman year, thinking she would never be well enough to return.

Diagnosed with a rare form of osteosarcoma, a bone cancer, Blake, 15, endured a rigorous course of chemotherapy over the ensuing months that weakened her body and left her feeling violently ill. The cancer spread to her lungs. Her prognosis was bleak.

But in August, she learned she has a fighting chance against the disease. Along with a new treatment plan from M.D. Anderson Cancer Center in Houston came more good news: she could return to school.

"I just eased right back into it," said Blake, an honors student. "I'm happy to be back in school because it's a lot of stress lifted off my shoulders. At home, you sit around thinking about everything that's happening."

The trip to M.D. Anderson was made possible by \$13,500 raised at an event held by the Jessica June Children's Cancer Founda-



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Amanda Blake, with her dad Dave Blake, recently got the OK to return to school at Coral Springs High.

tion and the Wasie Foundation for the single-parent Margate family. The funds paid travel expenses and a \$2,500 consultation fee not covered by Medicaid. At the cancer center, she met with Dr. **Pete Anderson**, a renowned pediatric osteosarcoma specialist.

"We found the number one guy at this cancer center, and he gave us hope when there was none," said **Dave Blake**, her father.

The situation before the Houston visit was dire, he said. She had been diagnosed the day after Christmas after complaining of

knee pain. She left school and started chemotherapy, and her left knee was eventually replaced. The chemo continued, but the cancer spread to her lungs.

The chemo regimen was rigorous, requiring a four-day hospital stay every three weeks, followed by blood transfusions every other day for two weeks.

"The chemo they were giving her was wiping her out, and school was out of the question," Dave Blake said. "People had to wear a mask when they came into the house."

The new course of treatment requires outpatient visits three Fridays a month at Miami Children's Hospital. It is less rigorous and kinder to her body.

"She doesn't get the nausea or the low blood count," Dave Blake said. "So her immune system is not as vulnerable."

After her first treatment on Aug. 28, she actually went home and ate, he said.

"There was no nausea. I felt that was the best part," she said. "I felt completely normal."

Anderson will monitor her treatment at Miami Children's Hospital.

Dave Blake, a single father of three, including sons David Jr., 14, and Dylan, 11, quit his job after her initial diagnosis to manage her care.

The family has struggled to pay living expenses, relying on local charities and fundraisers from friends and family to pay their monthly rent.

Dave Blake said his daughter will undergo her new treatment plan for nine weeks, then doctors will scan her lungs to see if she is ready for surgery to remove the cancer nodules from her lungs.

"All we need is one more miracle," he said.

To donate to the family, visit [www.jjccf.org](http://www.jjccf.org) or call 954-593-5603.