



SUSAN STOCKER/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Elaine Hamilton gives her 2-year-old granddaughter, Antonique, a kiss after her doctor's visit at Joe DiMaggio Children's Hospital.

Fighting a daily battle

BY SUSANNAH BRYAN
Staff writer

She is just a toddler.

But her vocabulary includes the words teddy and Doritos, chemo and port.

Doctors diagnosed 2-year-old Antonique Williams in April with a rare form of cancer known as a malignant peripheral nerve sheath tumor.

"And life hasn't been the same since," said her grandmother and caregiver, Elaine Hamilton. "Doctors say they are going to make her well. I believe that with all my heart. Antonique is going to make it. She'll make it."

In December 2010, Antonique had surgery to remove part of the tumor that is pressing against her spine and making it difficult for her to walk.

She undergoes chemotherapy every three weeks at Joe DiMaggio Children's Hospital in Hollywood. And every Thursday, doctors replace the cast on her left leg in an effort to

stretch her tendons and save the limb.

"The goal of our treatment is to shrink this tumor as much as we can," said Dr. Brian Cauff, Antonique's pediatric oncologist. When the tumor is small enough, doctors hope to remove the rest of it, Cauff said. Had they removed the entire tumor during the first surgery, Antonique would have lost her leg.

In July, Jessica June Children's Cancer Foundation helped the toddler and her grandmother move from West Palm Beach to Fort Lauderdale, closer to the medical care Antonique needs in Hollywood.

The charity provides emergency financial assistance to low-income families with children battling cancer.

"We pay their bills so they can focus on the child's survival rather than focusing on whether they are going to be homeless or have food the next day," said Sandra Muvdi, who founded the nonprofit after her daughter Jessica June Eiler Muvdi died of cancer in 2003. She was 7.

Jessica June serves fami-

lies in Broward, Miami-Dade and Palm Beach counties.

"Sometimes they are about to be evicted or their home is being foreclosed on," Muvdi said. "Or the lights are about to be shut off or the car is about to be repossessed."

Hamilton became "mommy" to Antonique four months after she was born, when her daughter said she could no longer care for the child. Since then, Antonique has become the center of her grandmother's life.

"She's such a loving child," Hamilton said.

On a recent Thursday, Antonique peered calmly at her leg while an orthopedic assistant cut off and removed her pink cast.

On days when Antonique cries, her grandmother comforts her with Doritos, hugs and a favorite pet pillow.

Earlier this year, Antonique underwent radiation therapy for five days a week to help shrink the tumor. Her doctors expect her to be on chemo for another year.

"I didn't know she was sick when I got her," Hamilton said. "Whatever her life span is, I don't care. I am enjoying my time with her. She's a precious soul."

How to help Jessica June Children's Cancer Foundation

Local

Friday December 2, 2011

For every family or person featured in Sun Sentinel Children's Fund stories, there are many more in need.

The program spotlighted here, Jessica June Children's Cancer Foundation, provides emergency financial assistance to low-income families with children battling cancer who are 17 and younger.

The charity serves families in Broward, Miami-Dade and Palm Beach counties and was founded in 2004 shortly after Sandra Muvdi lost her only child to cancer.

For information, contact founder Sandra Muvdi at 954-593-5603 or sandra@JJCCF.org. Or go to www.JJCCF.org.

Contributions to the Sun Sentinel Children's Fund will make it possible for local nonprofit agencies to serve needy children and families by providing grants for food, shelter, health care, abuse prevention services, educational and cultural programs — even toys for the holidays.

All administrative costs are paid by the Sun Sentinel and the McCormick Foundation, which contributes \$1 for every \$2 donated.

To contribute, go to SunSentinel.com/childrensfund or call 800-519-2480.



Online

See video of Antonique being helped by Jessica June Children's Cancer Foundation at SunSentinel.com/jessicajune