

Ace in the Hole

Hospice of Cincinnati Summertime Classic supports Fernside, a center for grieving children

*I*t's the stuff of legend. Chad Von Lehman stood at the Hyde Park Country Club with a foursome that included his stepfather, stepbrother and parish priest. Using his father's clubs, on a golf course where his dad once enjoyed membership, the 24-year-old sized up the shot. Right before the swing, Fr. Len Wernke predicted: "I see a Jag in your future!"

Truer words were never spoken. Chad's next shot made a hole-in-one on the par 3, 184-yard hole, to the delight of spectators who had braved the on-again, off-again rainy weather in support of the **Hospice of Cincinnati Summertime Classic**. The annual event benefits Fernside, a center for grieving children. The winning shot awarded Chad, a Fernside alumnus, a two-year lease on a Jaguar in addition to other prizes.

Vicky Ott, Fernside's executive director, was there to verify the winning drive. "I have to say I think Chad's making the hole-in-one made the event for everybody," Ott says. "We actually got rained out twice in the afternoon, but spirits were just really high because of that."

Ott was also there in the mid-'90s when Chad's mother brought him and his sister, Sarah, to Fernside to help them deal with the grief of their father's death.

"He was a bit resistant," remembers Sally Von Lehman, Chad's mom. "He was 12 years old." Fortunately, Chad was able to relate to others in his group.

"There was a male who ran his group, and that was really great for him to have another man to talk with," Sally says. "And [the process] was wonderful for me... It was really nice for me to be able to go at the same time that my kids were going and connect with folks who were going through the same experience."

Based in Blue Ash with other satellite locations, Fernside offers groups for children and teens who are grieving the death of a family member or friend. Children and teens meet with others their age grieving a similar death, while parents and guardians attend their own sessions. Trained facilitators address a theme each meeting through the use of expressive arts, games, music, puppetry and group discussion. The children can deeply trust the safety of the space to express their feelings, and yes, they describe their time together as fun.

The organization provides resources and literature for parents and professionals and works in collaboration with other community agencies to provide support to individuals with special needs. The nonprofit also continues to expand its services with grief groups for schools, crisis support, outreach and education, and camp programs.

The need is tremendous. Last year, more than 850 children, teens and adults participated in Fernside's support group program. More

than 300 individuals received services from the crisis response program. More than 1,000 telephone consultations were provided by the staff, and more than 1,000 individuals benefited from a community outreach education presentation.

A small but dedicated staff of six offers programs and organizes volunteers to meet this need. All services are provided at no cost.

"We don't charge for anything," Ott says. "It's things like the Summertime Classic that help us keep these services free of charge to the community."

Prior to Fernside's affiliation with Hospice of Cincinnati, Sally Von Lehman's family helped develop a golf event to honor the memory of her late husband, Mal, and raise funds for Fernside. With the new Hospice affiliation, Fernside became the beneficiary of the Hospice of Cincinnati Summertime Classic.

The two-day event offers a Sunday evening casual dinner and auction, with morning and afternoon flights of golf on Monday. A grill-out on the green for lunch and a pasta-bar dinner bookend the afternoon flight. The event raised more than \$213,000 last year, and since 2001, the Summertime Classic has provided more than \$1.2 million in funding. Committed volunteers and those who have gratefully received services continue to support the organization's development.

"I just think it's an unbelievable organization, and it has filled a hole," Sally says.

—Sue Goldberg

For this year's event information, see page 32.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF SHANE GAMBLE

