

# Golf classic to help families facing childhood cancer



Julie and Bart Thompson, with their four daughters (from left), Janessa, 9; Katie, 10; Samantha, 4; and Annie, 3. Photo provided to Palm 2 Jupiter

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A long list of sports greats will link up at the Hobe Sound Golf Club on Nov. 29 to raise money for a charity that helps families facing childhood cancer.

The Celebrities Fore Kids Golf Classic will celebrate its 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of assisting Treasure Coast residents by making a milestone announcement that it has surpassed the \$1 million mark.

"Each year, this organization has increased its gross revenue and its patient assistance," Founder and President Marlene Filer said. "We've helped more than 150 families in the Treasure Coast community. This is going to be a very special year for us."

Led by golf sensation Larry Laoretti and National Baseball Hall of Famer Gary Carter, CFK's fundraising tournament also will feature Michelle McGann, Jim Palmer, Dana Quigley and Mike Schmidt, among others.

Filer said the real superstar of the day will be a redheaded 3-year-old girl who suffers from neuroblastoma, cancer of the nerve cells.

"Our patient this year is little Annie," Filer said. "Quite frankly, she shouldn't be alive. To see her makes all of us realize why we do this as volunteers."

Julie Thompson, Annie's mother, said the diagnosis of her daughter on Feb. 3, 2009, changed the Hobe Sound family forever. Annie's cancer spread rapidly and, by June of 2009, the prognosis was grim.

"She was so toxic, that the doctor finally said, 'Just go home,'" Thompson said. "We brought her home to die, basically."

In August of 2009, a clinical trial opened for Annie at Miami Children's Hospital.

"We figured out we would need to go to Miami every week," the Hobe Sound resident said. "I wasn't sure how we would be able to afford it."

The nonprofit Pediatric Oncology Support Team referred Thompson to Celebrities Fore Kids, which provided the family with gas cards.

"What they gave us is what we needed to get us through," Thompson said. "We would probably end up going into the hole. We were stretched pretty thin."

Annie, while unable to walk or speak – "We've been teaching her sign language," Thompson said – has a head full of auburn locks and a loving relationship with her three older sisters, 10-year-old Katie, 9-year-old Janessa and 4-year-old Samantha.

"They call Annie their miracle baby," the 35-year-old mother said. "I know

she feels wonderful. She's eating. She's sleeping. She's grown really well.

She's got a lot of hair. If you were to look at her, you wouldn't know anything is wrong."

CFK continues to support the family – Annie has one year and four months left of weekly treatments in Miami – with gas cards, as well as Wal-Mart gift cards.

"I have not worked for seven months," said Thompson, a nurse at Martin Memorial Health Systems.

Her husband, Bart, a roofer, gets work when it's available.

"I just think it's wonderful that they donate to people in our community," Thompson said. "It is encouraging to see businessmen and women contributing to Celebrities Fore Kids and getting involved in the lives of those of us who have ended up where we never dreamed we'd be. They are helping to lift our load by their gifts and acts of kindness."

Larry Laoretti, who has a two-week old grandson, said he thought about what might happen to his family in the event of a childhood-cancer diagnosis.

"I was just talking to my wife about that," the Palm City resident said.

"What would happen if he developed cancer, or developed autism, or anything else. It's a tough way to live. It's hard."

Laoretti has dedicated his time and talent to the tournament for 10 years because he believes in the charitable cause.

"Three years ago, we recognized one girl who graduated from high school," Laoretti said. "She was making incredible progress, and I hope she still is."

After a 28-year career as a club professional in Jupiter, Laoretti won the 1992 U.S. Senior Open and became a celebrity. Now retired, he participates in half a dozen philanthropic events every year.

"I'm a local," Laoretti said. "We've always tried to help kids or people who were in need. We probably have the best tournament around that has Hall-of-Fame players from one sport or another. Hockey. Baseball. Football. Bowling. We have quite a list."

The tournament begins at 10:30 a.m. with registration and a luncheon, followed by an 11:45 a.m. 18-hole scramble.

An awards ceremony and dinner will highlight the evening. Each foursome is guaranteed to play with a celebrity and will receive a photo plaque of the team in addition to a gift package.

The sole fundraiser of the year for CFK brings in more than \$100,000, with proceeds benefiting patient families. ■