

## **Foundation is life raft for families**

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**Sheila Stroup**

The letters Janet and Bob Leslie receive from families they help let them know how important their mission is.

Here's how one note began: "The JL Foundation has been a life raft thrown out to us as we ride this terrible sea that is referred to as leukemia."

Janet and Bob understand that terrible sea all too well. Their daughter, Jennifer, was diagnosed with chronic myelogenous leukemia in 1986, when she was a senior at St. Scholastica Academy in Covington.

No bone marrow match could be found for her at the time, but Jennifer was determined to live, and the medicine she took put the cancer in remission.

She graduated from Louisiana State University, became a paralegal and settled in Mandeville. Then, in 2000, the leukemia returned.

"December of 2000 was a nightmare month," Janet said.

A tragic need

The family's journey through rough waters lasted nine months. In April 2001, Jennifer entered Memorial Medical Center in New Orleans, and for the next four months, Bob and Janet spent every moment they could with their daughter. She had a bone marrow transplant Aug. 8 but died Sept. 4, shortly before her 32nd birthday.

"There are no words to describe this tragedy in our lives," Bob said. The Covington couple wanted to do something special to honor their brave, beautiful daughter, so they established the JL Foundation to help people with travel and living expenses when a family member is fighting leukemia.

"We're in this for one reason. We saw a need for it," Bob said. "You have no idea how some people are struggling."

Reaching out

Their foundation has no office and pays no salaries. It is a labor of love of family members and a few close friends.

"Janet does 90 percent of the work," Bob said.

It is financed by donations and a golf tournament held each September. The money raised is used to buy such things as plane tickets to faraway cancer centers and meals for families camped out at hospitals.

When Janet wrote a check for \$120 to a young mother from Ville Platte whose 7-year-old son is receiving treatments at Children's Hospital, the woman burst into tears. "She said, 'Now, I know I have money to put gas in my car,'" Janet said.

Families are referred to the Leslies by doctors and hospital social workers. The year they started, they helped four families. Now, they're helping 24.

"My biggest concern is that we'll run out of money," Bob said.

Besides offering people a helping hand, the Leslies give parents who've lost a child to leukemia someone to talk to who understands their grief.

"I tell people, 'You never get over it, but you learn to deal with it,' " Bob said. "Remembering Jennifer this way has just done wonders for us. It's amazing how good you feel when you help somebody."

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For information about the JL Foundation and the 3rd Annual JL Memorial Golf Classic, visit [www.jlffoundation.org](http://www.jlffoundation.org) or call the Leslies at (985) 892-6749.

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