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HOUSTON CHRONICLE ARCHIVES

Paper: Houston Chronicle**Date:** Thu 10/04/2007**Section:** ThisWeek**Page:** 3**Edition:** 2 STAR**Fundraising effort take to the road for Candlelighters / Group helps families of children with cancer**

By ARLENE NISSON LASSIN, Houston Chronicle Correspondent

A friend's invitation in 2000 to volunteer at Camp Cliff, a weekend camp for children with cancer at Camp for All near Brenham, began Jay Beasley's tireless work on behalf of Candlelighters Childhood Cancer Family Alliance, a nonprofit organization that serves as a support group for parents and families with children being treated for cancer.

"Candlelighters is such a wonderful charity that provides essential programs and services to over 1,100 Houston families each year," said Beasley, 34, who lives with his wife Holly in the Garden Oaks area.

"They go from hospital room to room offering assistance to the family whose child is being treated for cancer, giving them gas cards, grocery gift cards, parking passes, and providing parent consultants who share information and experience with treatment."

Camp Cliff is open to families of children undergoing cancer treatment at Texas Children's Hospital or M.D. Anderson Cancer Center.

After his first Camp Cliff, Beasley was so enamored with the organization he offered to work on its annual "Tee it Up" benefit golf tournament. Since that time he has been actively involved with raising funds for the organization, has served on its board and continues to volunteer as a counselor at the camp.

For the last few years Beasley has chaired the golf tournament, which will be held Feb. 8, 2008, at Wildcat Golf Club.

But one fundraising effort slated for this year is taking a slightly different route.

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Jack Cruz, a coworker of Beasley's at Gexa Energy, 29 Greenway Plaza, offered a rather unique opportunity to raise money for Beasley's favorite cause.

Cruz offered to drive a car in the 2,000-mile La Carrera Panamericana 2007 road race from Nuevo Laredo to Oaxaca, Mexico, an annual event set this year for Oct. 26-Nov. 1.

Gexa Energy became the title sponsor for the team, called "Pony Up Racing," and financed the rebuilding of a 1966 Ford Mustang for Cruz to drive.

The effort has been dubbed "Miles for Smiles."

"People are pledging anywhere from a penny to a dollar a mile, that they will pay at the conclusion of the race depending how far the car makes it," Beasley said. "The race will be broadcast on the Internet and on ESPN2 so supporters can follow the progress of our Pony Up team."

So far, 23 sponsors have helped defray expenses leading up to the race, and \$37,000 was raised at a kickoff party in June. Beasley hopes to raise \$50,000.

The race is even more meaningful to Beasley as a co-worker's son, Nathaniel Foster, who has leukemia, participates in Candlelighters programs.

"We are paying tribute to him in this race and we are racing in his honor," Beasley said.

Candlelighters Childhood Cancer Family Alliance was founded in 1989 and was incorporated in 1992. Although there are other Candlelighters organizations around the country, each city's group is a separate entity.

Houston's organization is based at 8323 Southwest Freeway. In addition to Camp Cliff, the organization sponsors an "adopt a family" program for the Christmas holidays, hosts a fall festival and holds support group meetings.

The organization serves an average of 800 families each month, and expects to raise \$353,000 this year through three events.

Beasley has served on the organization's board of directors since 2002 and he was elected vice president in 2003. He is again serving as vice president for 2006-07.

"Jay has a real passion for Candlelighters and he jumps at opportunities to help us raise money," said Gay Foust, executive director of the organization. "He began as a volunteer and has become so active. He is one of our most active board members and heads up two of our major fundraisers."

For information on "Miles for Smiles," visit Beasley's Web site at www.ponyupracing.org.

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