



By: Benita Zahn

Mom helps cancer patients

When your child is diagnosed with cancer, all you want is a cure. But what happens when your child loses the battle? If you're Gina Peca, you don't give up the fight. You join the ranks of moms making a difference.

It was a 'bittersweet 16' party in honor of Catie Hock that brought out a big crowd on March 20th and Catie's mom, Gina Peca was the ringleader, raising more than \$600,000 to start a foundation in her daughter's honor.

It's a story that began 10 years ago when Catie, just 6, was diagnosed with cancer - Neuroblastoma.

Her mom describes her first born as sunshine. She even made magic by striking up a pen pal friendship with J.K. Rowling, author of the Harry Potter books.

So how did Gina manage to go on when, 3 years later, that light went out. In her words, "If you knew Catie, the answer would be simple. you have to live up to her standards."

Catie wanted other kids to enjoy life as much as she did, despite her illness. The generosity of friends and family insured the family could travel to New York for Catie's treatment and take trips to keep her spirits up.

So before Catie died she told her mom to make a list of all the great places they'd been to, for other kids to visit. In essence, Catie was laying the foundation for the foundation in her name.

Her mom says, "It started by me calling a friend." She got a few donations and it took off.

Then a friend suggested holding a race. They called it the Catie Bug. Other events followed. Money raised went to families with children undergoing treatment at Sloan Memorial Kettering Cancer Center where Catie was treated, Dana Farber Cancer Center, Albany Medical Center and the Ronald McDonald House.

"I would say several hundred kids have been touched by Catie and her memory and the foundation," Peca said. "We say to these families, live for today. This will be with you. This day will be with you forever."

Notes from families who've benefited, fill Gina's heart. But she's always had a bigger goal in mind. To fund a research position at Sloan Memorial Kettering where Catie was treated, to find a cure.

So in honor of what would have been Catie's 16th birthday, the Foundation donated \$250,000. The first installment of a \$1.5 million pledge.