

Gala of Hope raises \$700,000 to fight cancer

Beavercreek man knows firsthand how funds lead to more survivors.

By Meredith Moss
Staff Writer

A Beavercreek man whose life has been touched by cancer is dedicating himself to the eradication of the disease.

“People still keep getting cancer, so I keep working,” said Bob Mills, a Miami Valley entrepreneur who has raised \$2 million in recent years for cancer-related causes.

Most recently, Mills and his co-chair Barbara Schenck raised close to \$700,000 at an elegant black-tie fundraiser on the grounds of his estate. Seven hundred attended the first Gala of Hope on July 28.

The festive evening, emceed by WHIO-TV’s Letitia Perry, included a sit-down dinner, late-night dancing, and a silent and live auction. Among the items auctioned were a Corvette that sold for \$26,500 and was then donated back and sold a second time. In memory of his good friend, Doug Miller, who died three weeks after being diagnosed with pancreatic cancer, Mills auctioned off a poker table.

“We had a poker club, so we sold his favorite table,” Mills said. “We sold it for \$10,500, and two other people wanted one, so we sold three in all.”

Brant Woodward, vice president of income development for the American Cancer So-



WHIO-TV anchor Letitia Perry looks at the 1989 Corvette that was auctioned during the inaugural American Cancer Society Gala of Hope, ‘An Evening of Summer Elegance,’ at Fox Hill Estates in Beavercreek. Perry also was the master of ceremonies for the event. CONTRIBUTED PHOTO BY PETER WINE

ciety, told party patrons that Dayton’s Gala of Hope brought in more dollars in its first year than any other first-time event, not only in Dayton, but in the history of the organization’s East Central Division. The event’s predecessor was known as the Cattle Baron’s Ball, but when Mills and Schenck agreed to chair the fund raiser, they determined “to give it a new identity.”

The new formula worked.

“We are raising more money at the Gala of Hope than any other single gala event nationally in comparative market sizes,” Woodward said.

Mills, who was named the 2012 National Man of the Year by the Leukemia & Lymphoma Society, is chairman of Synergy Building Systems and the Mills Development Companies. His granddaughter, Ally Barnett, was diagnosed with acute lymphocytic leukemia at the age of 7. At the age of 53, Mills himself learned he had malignant melanoma.

“It was at the stage where not a lot of people survive,” he told the Dayton Daily News in 2010. “I made a promise to myself and God that if I survived I would use my remaining years to help other people.”

In between his own cancer and Ally’s, he lost his wife to cancer.

“I don’t know how to mix chemicals or perform surgery to beat cancer,” he said, “but I know how to organize and manage programs to raise money.”

Mills said one of his strengths as a fundraiser is his ability to get sponsors for his big events. He and Schenck signed up 73 sponsors at a minimum pledge of \$2,500 for the recent gala. Four of the sponsors pledged \$25,000 each.

“The people we approach are our friends. They are com-

passionate and understand the severity of cancer,” said Mills, who played a video at the event that stated one out of every three people in the room had been diagnosed with some form of cancer and the other two have been or are destined to be caregivers.

Schenck said those with breast and prostate cancer are surviving for longer periods of time because of research and early detection.

“The cure rate for the type of leukemia that my granddaughter had is approaching 88 percent,” said Mills, adding that Ally is doing well. “If her mother had gotten it at her age, she would have died. So there are real advancements being made.”

Mills and Schenck believe that holding a large fundraiser at a private home is more personal and interesting for guests. But after contending with rain after some big events, Mills decided to construct a new party pavilion and add permanent stadium-style restrooms. The structure is built to accommodate a large tent.

Monies raised at the July event will go to research and patient care through the American Cancer Society. Mills designated \$70,000 of the money be spent on pediatric cancer research.

Mills was the American Cancer Society’s Man of the Year in 2011, also was the recipient of the 2008 Volunteer Fundraiser of the Year.

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