

St. Baldrick's Foundation Shave-a-thon raises hope

Bald is beautiful!

For the St. Baldrick's Foundation, bald means much more than that. It means funds for childhood cancer research worldwide.

St. Baldrick's began its journey in 1999 on a whim. Three reinsurance executives in New York City decided to shave their heads and get people to pledge money, which they would donate to help kids with cancer. Hoping to raise \$17,000, on March 17, 2000, they raised \$104,000. Realizing they were on to something, by 2004 they had incorporated as a 501c3 non-profit organization.

St. Baldrick's donates the funds raised by volunteers to organizations such as Vannie E. Cook Jr. Children's Cancer Center, which has received over \$185,000, including a recent grant for \$80,670; MD Anderson; St. Jude's and Baylor College of Medicine in Waco. Countries worldwide have received grants from St. Baldrick's, totaling so far over \$155 million—all from a simple shave of a head.

"Last year there were 1300 shaving events worldwide, shaving 56,000 people," said co-chairmen of this year's event, Bob Heiser.

"Research for childhood cancer is very under-funded, receiving only four percent of federal funds. 75 percent of kids with cancer are treated in a trial. As a result of the grants Vannie E. Cook has received,

they now have a research nurse so they can get in all the latest trials. The results of those trials are visible to researchers worldwide," Heiser said.

"Back in the 1950s, if a child came down with cancer, they had a five percent chance of surviving the cancer. Right now, the overall survival rate in developed countries is 78 percent. But—and there's a big but—two thirds of them have problems afterwards. They've lost an eye, they've lost a limb, they have PTSD stress just like the soldiers. They have learning disabilities. They can't have kids. They have a shorter life span or recurrent cancer. There's a lot more work to be done."

Wayne and Pat Chapman, co-chairs of the event and friends of the Heisers, lost a son to cancer. Their daughter works at St. Baldrick's Foundation as the chief philanthropy officer and Pat is a cancer survivor.

"Instead of sitting home and crying in their beer, they decided to try and do something. They asked all their friends to help. We were one of their friends that have been helping them," Heiser, also a prostate cancer survivor, went on to explain their involvement.

Starting it off five years ago at Texas Trails, it was their round dancing group that filled out the volunteer list and it's still the round dancers helping with their upcoming head shaving event being held on

Sunday, March 10, from 2 to 4 p.m. at the Pharr Civic Center, 1011 West Kelly in Pharr.

"It works like a walk or a run, which everybody's familiar with. We're basically getting people to sign up to shave their heads and asking their friends and relatives to support them with donations," Bob said. "There was a lady at Pharr South who baked cookies and went around to everybody in her park, getting donations for St. Baldrick's. She also organized a dinner at Gatti's where Gatti's gave 10 percent of the proceeds to St. Baldrick's. By the time she shaved her head, she had raised \$6,000."

Though only two hours long, it will be

a fun-filled event, thanks to major sponsors Walmart, H-E-B and Kohls. Oscar Adame will emcee. Plenty of barbers will be available to shave heads. The group, Musical Memories, will be on hand as well as a silent auction keeping people busy. Physicians from Vannie E. Cook will be ready to shave as will Pharr fire fighters. Heiser will be there with his grant green and white hat, which will not protect his head from getting shaved. There will be lots of cheering going on As the Hair Falls.

For further information, call Bob Heiser at 325-374-2720, email him at shave@flyweb.us or check out the website at www.st-baldricks.org/events/valley.



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