

LEGACY

ACHIEVEMENTS IN HEALTH CARE, MEDICAL SCIENCE, AND PHILANTHROPY

IRIS S. & BERT L. WOLSTEIN'S
**KIDS KICKING
CANCER**



Kids



Iris S. Wolstein creates Kids Kicking Cancer

by Jerry Pockar

Tears welled in Iris S. Wolstein's eyes as she watched the children frolicking at the Lost Nation Sports Park indoor soccer field in July. She was thinking of how much her late husband would have loved seeing the result of her \$1 million gift to endow Rainbow Babies & Children's Hospital's **Iris S. and Bert L. Wolstein's Kids Kicking Cancer program.**

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John J. Letterio, MD
Jane & Lee Seidman Chair in Pediatric Cancer Innovation

For two years Mrs. Wolstein worked in close collaboration with Rainbow doctors and staff members to create a program to restore the vitality of childhood to young cancer survivors. Wolstein’s Kids Kicking Cancer is attacking that goal by teaching athletic skills and fitness conditioning to children who have gone through treatment for various forms of cancer at Rainbow and University Hospitals Ireland Cancer Center.

Mrs. Wolstein was moved to make her gift because her late husband, the founder of Developers Diversified and the onetime owner of soccer’s Cleveland Force, loved sports, experienced cancer and was long animated by a powerful desire to give back.

need to be

With the sounds of playing children sharply audible behind her, the philanthropist observed: “Bart was an athlete, and he loved young people. Unfortunately, cancer took him before his time. Soccer, children, cancer – it all works together in the Kids Kicking Cancer program. This gift speaks in a particular way of my relationship with Bart.”

Mrs. Wolstein remembered the path she and her late husband took from very humble circumstances in Cleveland’s central city. “When Bart became successful, the most important thing for him was to give back. He taught me how to give.”

When she and hospital leaders conceived the Kids Kicking Cancer program, she loved it immediately. But this gracious benefactor did not want to stand on the sidelines. Motivated by her husband’s example, she became deeply involved in the development of the program and had a vision for expanding it beyond its original concept.

Her vision paid off. “I do believe it’s a unique program, and when I watch them at play, I know with certainty that we are creating joy for these kids.”



Kids like Jacob Friedman, who, when it seemed he might do a “header” on a ball flying into range, drew a warning call from his nurse on the sidelines. Jacob flashed the pained expression of an 11-year-old whose freedom is being violated by a cautious adult, but the shaved patch of his hair revealed the nurse just might be correct in asserting that her patient should wait a while before attempting a header.

Kids like Chris Buzinski, who was here with his dad Rick. Fairly flying along this morning on a four-wheeled walker, Chris is challenged by cerebral palsy and for eight years has battled brain, optic and other tumors.

Mrs. Wolstein remembered Chris from last year, saying, “Last year he wasn’t doing so well, but this year he looks so good.”

All 50 children looked so good: at times turning toward the ball in unison like a school of fish; at other moments, intently focused on taking in the skill stations lessons being offered by Hector Marinaro, professional indoor soccer’s all-time leader in points and goals; Ohio Youth Soccer Association leader Tom Turner, and a group of younger players from the Cleveland City Stars pro squad. The kids especially enjoyed kick-a-goal past-your-doctor-or-nurse.

Many of those doctors and nurses and other members of the Rainbow team were present. John J. Letterio, MD, Chief of Pediatric Hematology and Oncology, commented: “Today’s gift represents two years of Iris’ leadership building Kids Kicking Cancer into a comprehensive program to satisfy an important need. Her philanthropy is wonderful, but what also captured our attention is the way she worked closely with us to make it the best possible program. Her understanding of what our children require is a rare gift.”

The pediatric oncology expert observed that medical therapy is only part of the solution for a cancer patient: “To successfully make the journey from patient to survivor requires emotional and physical preparedness, and our children have to call on their full human complexity to complete that journey.”



“Even though they’re going through a challenging medical situation, kids need to be kids,” observed Rainbow President Michael J. Farrell. “Here they can do that within the framework of a group that understands their situation. This program allows them to regain physical fitness, participate, be active and have fun. Most gifts aren’t targeted at the follow-up to the disease. Iris has a vision of how one can be supportive of the whole process.”

And it’s not just soccer. Because Mrs. Wolstein attributes her physical fitness to staying active through tennis, golf and swimming and wanted to give the joy of those activities to the children as well, the program is being expanded this year to include those sports.

Mrs. Wolstein was on hand when the first golf skills clinic happened at the end of July at The First Tee of Cleveland. Tennis balls flew this fall, and the kids will be in the pool for a swimming clinic in January. Kids Kicking Cancer is also offering year-round activity and fitness conditioning under the direction of Rainbow’s pediatric sports medicine experts.

In 2003, prior to Mr. Wolstein’s death, the couple gave \$25 million to University Hospitals and Case Western Reserve University to name the Iris S. and Bert L. Wolstein Research Building.

In Willoughby, the hands-on-philanthropist said, “I visit the research facility to understand what is happening there. It’s such a joy to see the results of that research in these children at play. This is the third year for the camp and I see children coming back healthier and happier.”

As she stepped forward to announce the \$1 million gift, she was surrounded by children who hugged her. Those tears welled up in her eyes again. Just as she is having a profound effect on the children, they are having a profound effect on her. UH

For more information about the program, call 216.844.3919. To help support this initiative, call 216.844.0410

