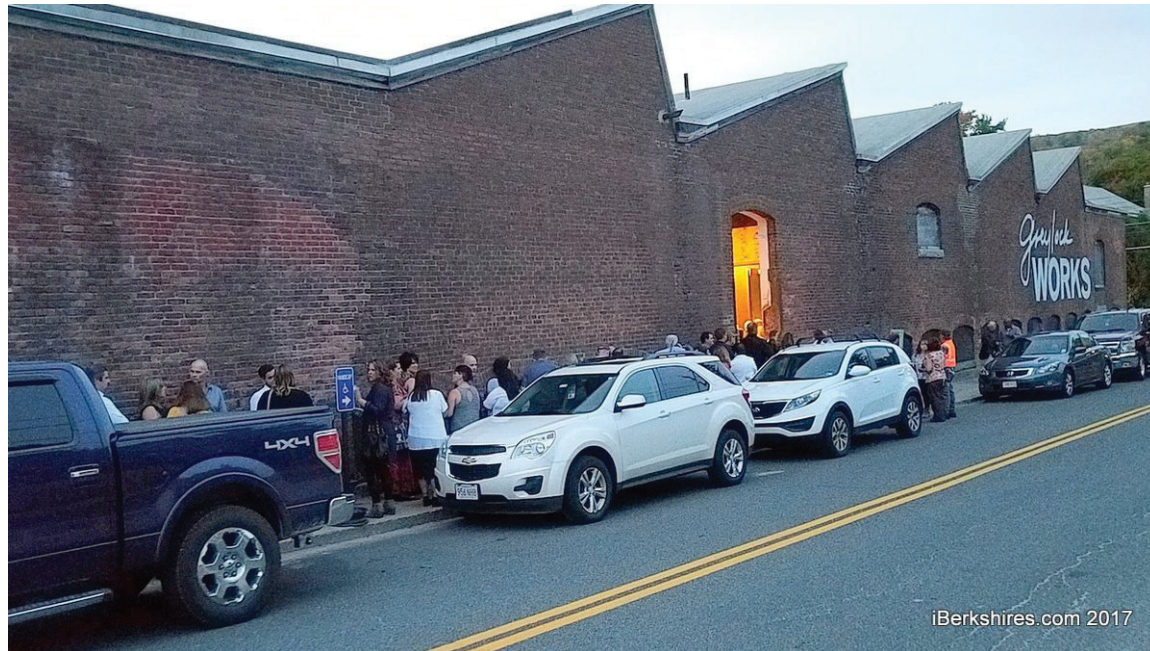




North County Turns Out in Drove for Annual PopCares Fundraiser



The line outside Greylock Works to get into the building on Saturday.

By Tammy Daniels
iBerkshires Staff
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NORTH ADAMS, Mass. — One only needed to gaze across the crowded room Saturday night to understand the impact PopCares has had on the community during its five short years.

Some 635 tickets were sold for the event, more than double last year's annual chicken dinner and auction. The demand was so great that the popular fundraiser was moved this year from the Bounti-Fare to the newly renovated Greylock Works.

"Without this space, 300 of you would be sitting on someone's lap," joked Bob St. Pierre, one of the founders of the family nonprofit PopCares, named for his father, the late William St. Pierre.

In between dinner, still served by Bounti-Fare's David Nicholas and his staff, who took up residence in the mill's new commercial kitchen, and the chinese, silent and not-so-silent auctions, organizers reminded the cheerful party just why they were there — and spending \$260 a pop for platters of whoopie pies.

"We saw firsthand the financial struggles my parents faced as my dad went through treatment," St. Pierre said. "My brother's wife came up with the idea of raising money for families battling cancer to honor Pop.

Being St. Pierres, we decided we were going to do it right."

The all-volunteer organization's mission is to raise funds locally and spend funds locally to support individuals and families dealing with cancer.

"Cancer has touched the life of so many of us and PopCares is here to show that one small act of kindness can mean the world to someone who is facing this horrible disease," said Tammy St. Pierre, wife of Bill St. Pierre. "Everyone's journey is different and unique for each individual, which means peoples' needs are different."

St. Pierre knows what she's talking about as she deals with the demands of family even as she continues her own battle against cancer.

"I know firsthand how difficult it is but I also know the kindness that is shown by your friends loved ones and PopCares is amazing," Tammy St. Pierre said. "They truly care about our community and respect the caregivers that they support. It's because of all of you here tonight that we can help those in need while honoring the man who stood as an example for all of us."

The outpouring of support for PopCares has been phenomenal. In just five years, the group has raised more than \$300,000, said Bill St. Pierre, and served nearly 600 people. "By the end of this year, we will have sent out over \$70,000," he said.

The nonprofit offers to support for cancer patients and caregivers in Adams, Cheshire, Clarksburg, Florida, Hancock, Lanesborough, New Ashford, North Adams, Savoy, Williamstown, and Windsor, as well as the Vermont towns of Pownal, Stamford and Readsboro.

PopCares helps people with gas to get to faraway appointments, gift certificates for meals and lodging, or groceries, rent and utilities to tide them over. Sometimes its just "small acts of kindness" to let those fighting cancer know they haven't been forgotten.

It was the large and small acts that Patrick and Crista Wood remembered as they shared their journey, and that of their son, Carrick, who died in June just short of his third birthday.

On their lowest days, "We would get a card, 'Just thinking of you, PopCares,'" said Crista Wood. "We've been extremely lucky to have our entire community support us."

Carrick was born on July 4, 2014, with acute myeloid leukemia. The plucky little boy lived life to its fullest in the short time he had, Wood said. But his hard-won victory over cancer came cost him his heart, which was damaged by his cancer treatments.

"Cancer is the leading cause of death for children," Wood said. "Despite this, childhood cancer research is vastly and consistently underfunded.

"Two-thirds of childhood cancer survivors will have lifelong chronic health conditios from treatment. In 20 years, only three cancer medications have been specifically developed for children. Carrick's chemotherapy cocktail was more than 30 years old."

Every three minutes a child is diagnosed with cancer, she said, affecting 700 families every day.

The Woods feel that Carrick was sent to them to "inspire others to give people the greatest gift life has to offer ... love and hope," Crista Wood said. "He wasn't the boy who survived cancer, he wasn't the boy with a



bad heart, he was just Carrick. He was just our baby.”

More than 600 people attended the dinner in the newly renovated Weave Shed at Greylock Works. Large screens allowed those in the back to follow the action.

PopCares recognized others doing good works in the community. The Spirit of Kindness Award was presented to Alice Trumbull of Moment’s House, which offers a place of support for cancer patients and survivors and their caregivers.

Robert West of West Oil Co. and Jeffrey Levanos of Jack’s Hot Dog Stand were named this year’s Community Partners for their unwavering support of not only PopCares but other community events.

The St. Pierres also thanked the many family members, volunteers and community sponsors who have made the organization a success.

The Junior Spirit of Kindness Award was given to 7-year-old Mason Stred, whose fundraising project at Clarksburg School, Rainbow Rocks for \$1, raised \$2,500 for PopCares.

“Here’s a rock from me to you that grants wishes and happiness, too,” he explained during his prepared remarks to the gathering.

“We decided to donate the money to PopCares, they help so many local families battling with cancer,” he said. “The money was raised local so we wanted it to stay local ... I am humbled by the great success of this fundraiser. I couldn’t be more proud that we were able to donate the money to PopCares.”

For more information on donating to PopCares or requesting help, go to www.popcares.org.