

Cancer society honors attorney

Avon's Matthew Nakon founded charity in memory of wife, who died of cancer

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LORAIN — Avon attorney Matthew Nakon was named the American Cancer Society's "Living Angel" of 2010 Saturday night at a fundraising event at DeLuca's Place in the Park for his work raising money in his late wife's name to help families fighting breast cancer pay their bills.

"Our Angel has exposed the limitations of cancer," said host Dr. Alex Zolli. "It claimed the love of his life, but it did not conquer his spirit. ... The hallmark of his efforts rests not in the numbers and dollars, but rather in the uplifting of the human spirit. ... He stands as a beacon of hope, aiding many during their difficult journey."



Nakon

Nakon met his wife, Karen, in college, and they started their family in 1992. In 1998, while Karen Nakon was seven months pregnant with their third child, they learned a lump she'd discovered 20 months before was breast cancer.

"Talk about having the perfect life and having that life turned upside down just like that," Nakon said after getting his award and angel pin.

Karen Nakon died on her 38th birthday — the same day her husband established the legal framework for The Karen P. Nakon Breast Cancer Foundation.

A poised but emotionally affected Nakon told the crowd, "Karen gave us a tremendous way to show our children that good can result from the worst of tragedies."

Nakon said it was "wonderful" and a "pleasant surprise" to be recognized for the work the

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foundation does helping other families deal with the overwhelming cost of breast cancer treatment but said "it's not why we do what we do."

Karen Nakon endured five years of treatment that included eight surgeries and more than 300 chemotherapy sessions. The idea for the foundation was born as she and her husband rode the elevator to one of her treatments and listened as a couple of families were discussing the financial hardships and their concerns over losing their jobs or their insurance because of their cancer. The couple created the foundation that night as they sat at their kitchen table.

Since 2004, the foundation has raised more than \$360,000 and helped 200 families throughout the state, Nakon said. The foundation gives away 100 percent of the money it raises and is administered out of the law offices of Wickens, Herzer, Panza, Cook and Batista where Nakon is a partner.

The foundation fields 150 or so applications from families each year and tends to choose those who'd been doing fine

until the cost of breast cancer decimated their finances.

Nakon told the crowd one recent recipient was a couple in North Ridgeville. Both parents are police officers, and they have five children and found themselves about to lose their home because of the expense of her breast cancer treatments. The foundation covered their mortgage for five months until her treatments were completed.

"This need is not being filled by anyone else," Nakon said. "We can't help every family but those we can help, we can get them through the process. ... We intend to continue to do that as long as we can."

During his acceptance speech, Nakon thanked his co-workers, the foundation's board of directors and his family, especially his three children who have been volunteering with the foundation for years and "who own me and who, quite frankly, know it. ... Your mother would be very proud of you."

Anyone interested in the foundation, or in donating, can visit www.nakonfoundation.org or call (440) 933-7621.

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