

LIVING ANGEL 2010

‘I AM HONORED TO BEGIN THIS PART OF OUR EVENING BY INTRODUCING OUR LIVING ANGELS WHO ARE HERE TONIGHT:

1995 PATTI BETKA
1999 MARY KAY ROWELL
2002 JOHN VANCO
2005 DR. RUBEN ESCURO
2005 MARIA ESCURO
2007 BEVERLY ANN DAVIS
2008 EMILY ZICCHI
2008 LAURA ZICCHI

LET US PAUSE NOW FOR A MOMENT IN MEMORY OF OUR THREE DEPARTED ANGELS: MITZI, MARIE AND SHELLEY AND FOR THE SPECIAL SOMEONE IN OUR HEARTS, OUR OWN “ANGEL.”

INSPIRATION, FAITH, MOTIVATION, COURAGE, WILL POWER, DETERMINATION, HOPE, PERSERVERANCE, HUMILITY AND LOVE – ALL DEFINE THE FINEST OF HUMAN QUALITIES – ALL SIGNIFY THE ESSENCE OF THE LIVING ANGEL. OVER THE YEARS WE HAVE CELEBRATED 19 TRULY UNIQUE INDIVIDUALS. OVER THE YEARS, WE HAVE BEEN PROFOUNDLY TOUCHED BY THEIR ACHIEVEMENTS.

THE LIVING ANGELS LIVE LIFE WITH AN ATTITUDE OF GRATITUDE. THEIR PATHS TO THIS PODIUM ARE ETCHED IN CHOICES MADE, ROADS TRAVELED AND LIVES TOUCHED. THEY HAVE GIVEN ALL OF US INSPIRATION. THEY HAVE TOUCHED OUR HEARTS. SO IT IS IN THIS SPIRIT THAT WE NOW EXAMINE THE PORTRAIT OF OUR NEWEST ANGEL.

WE FIND THREE DISTINCT ELEMENTS : A LOVE STORY, A PROMISE AND A LEGACY.

THE LOVE STORY

OUR ANGEL AND HIS WIFE KAREN MET AS TEENAGERS IN COLLEGE. IN HIS OWN WORDS: “SHE IS THE LOVE OF MY LIFE. KAREN AND I WERE ENGAGED SHORTLY AFTER I LEFT FOR LAW SCHOOL.” HE PLAINLY STATES THAT HE WAS NOT LEAVING HER BEHIND FOR THE VULTURES WITHOUT A RING ON HER FINGER.

THEY STARTED THEIR FAMILY IN 1992, WELCOMING NICHOLAS. THEIR FIRST DAUGHTER, MORGAN, MADE IT A FOURSOME IN 1993. THEY NOW HAD WHAT MOST WOULD CONSIDER THE PERFECT FAMILY; KAREN BUILDING THE FOUNDATION OF THE FAMILY UNIT AND OUR ANGEL BUILDING HIS LAW CAREER. NEVER DID THEY DREAM THAT CANCER WOULD ENTER THEIR LIVES – WAS IT NOT A DISEASE RESERVED FOR THE ELDERLY OR THOSE LESS CAREFUL WITH THEIR HEALTH?

IN EARLY 1996 KAREN DETECTED A BREAST LUMP. HOWEVER, IT REMAINED UNDIAGNOSED UNTIL 20 MONTHS LATER WHEN SHE WAS PREGNANT WITH MADISON. WITHIN A FEW DAYS OF HER THIRD CHILD’S BIRTH, KAREN STARTED SERIOUS MULTIPLE DOSE CHEMOTHERAPY. AND SO FOR FIVE FULL YEARS, EIGHT SURGERIES AND MORE THAN 300 CHEMOTHERAPY SESSIONS, TREATMENT CONTINUED. LOVINGLY, HAND IN HAND, OUR COUPLE JOURNEYED THIS ROAD TOGETHER. THROUGH IT ALL, KAREN DEMONSTRATED UNWAVERING FAITH. IT STRENGTHENED HER THROUGHOUT THE ORDEAL. IT CARRIED HER UNTIL THE END. SHE DIED ON HER 38TH BIRTHDAY.

THE PROMISE

IT WAS DURING A HOSPITAL ELEVATOR RIDE ON ONE OF THOSE MANY VISITS FOR TREATMENT THAT KAREN AND OUR ANGEL FIRST APPRECIATED THE

OTHER COMPONENT OF THE FIGHT AGAINST CANCER. THEY LISTENED ATTENTIVELY AS A YOUNG WOMAN AGONIZED ABOUT HER ADVANCED DISEASE, THE NEEDS OF HER SMALL CHILD AND THE THREAT OF LOSING HER JOB BECAUSE OF HER DISEASE. THIS CHANCE ENCOUNTER REVEALED THE OTHER UGLY FACE OF CANCER : THE FINANCIAL IMPACT ON BOTH THE PATIENT AND FAMILY. KAREN AND OUR ANGEL RESOLVED THEN AND THERE TO HELP OTHERS BURDENED BY THE STAGGERING COST OF BREAST CANCER CARE. THEY STRATEGIZED ON HOW BEST TO ACHIEVE THIS GOAL. THE EMOTION AND COMMITMENT ENGENDERED BY KAREN HERSELF SERVED AS THE IMPETUS FOR THIS PROMISE. OUR ANGEL HOWEVER IS THE KEEPER OF THIS FLAME.

THE LEGACY

OUR ANGEL HAS EXPOSED THE LIMITATIONS OF CANCER :

IT CLAIMED THE LOVE OF HIS LIFE, BUT IT DID NOT CONQUER HIS SPIRIT...

IT LEFT HIM WITH THREE YOUNG CHILDREN BUT IT DID NOT SILENCE HIS COURAGE OR LOVE...

IT CHALLENGED HIM WITH A PROMISE TO FULFILL BUT IT DID NOT DAMPEN HIS RESOLVE TO DO SO.

HE BECAME THE INSPIRATION AND FIRE BEHIND THE FOUNDATION THAT BEARS HIS WIFE'S NAME.

ON THE VERY DAY OF KAREN'S PASSING OUR ANGEL ESTABLISHED THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE FOUNDATION. THE SEED MONEY CAME FROM THE MEMORIAL DONATIONS. HE RALLIED SUPPORT FROM FAMILY, FRIENDS, CLIENTS, BUSINESS ASSOCIATES, ACQUAINTANCES AND STRANGERS. A BOARD OF DIRECTORS WAS APPOINTED AND AN ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE WAS OPENED.

THE MISSION STATEMENT WAS CREATED : "TO

EXTEND FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE TO FAMILIES WHO ARE BURDENED WITH THE STAGGERING COST OF BREAST CANCER CARE.”

SINCE FEBRUARY 2003, A NUMBER OF FOUNDATION PROGRAMS HAVE BEEN CREATED – ALL WITH THE SINGULAR GOAL OF PROVIDING FUNDS FOR ITS MISSION. THIS FOUNDATION GIVES AWAY 100% OF ITS INCOME. TO THIS DAY, OUR ANGEL DEVOTES 10 TO 15 HOURS PER WEEK IN FULFILLING HIS PROMISE, IN FOSTERING THE LEGACY.

OVER TIME, APPROXIMATELY 200 FAMILIES HAVE RECEIVED MORE THAN \$360,000 SO THAT THE MORTGAGE OR THE HEATING BILL COULD BE PAID OR NEEDED GROCERIES COULD BE PROVIDED, IN ESSENCE HELPING FAMILIES EVERY DAY ALL ACROSS THE COUNTIES OF NORTHEAST OHIO. EACH GRANT RECIPIENT HAS EXPRESSED GRATITUDE FOR THE HELP THEY HAVE RECEIVED. LET US LISTEN TO TWO OF THEM :

“THIS DISEASE HAS BEEN HARD ON ALL OF US. EACH MONTH WE GET FURTHER AND FURTHER BEHIND. WE ARE SO GRATEFUL FOR YOUR SUPPORT.” AND ANOTHER :

“THANKS SO VERY MUCH FOR THE FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE. THIS WILL GIVE US A CHANCE TO GET CAUGHT UP. I FEEL THAT MY MEDICAL CONDITION HAS PUT SUCH A BURDEN ON MY FAMILY.”

THIS FOUNDATION DOES NOT CAP ITS DONATIONS BUT LOOKS TO PROVIDE SUFFICIENT AID SO THAT FAMILIES CAN SURVIVE THEIR CRISES. THESE EFFORTS ADDRESS THE MOST IMPORTANT NON-MEDICAL COMPONENT OF CANCER CARE AND RECOVERY : PEACE OF MIND! THIS LABOR OF LOVE STANDS UNPARELLELED IN THE CRUSADE AGAINST THIS DREADED DISEASE.

PERHAPS ST. FRANCIS HAD OUR ANGEL IN MIND WHEN HE PRAYED THESE WORDS :

“LORD MAKE ME AN INSTRUMENT OF THY PEACE. WHERE THERE IS DOUBT, LET ME SOW FAITH; WHERE THERE IS DESPAIR, HOPE; WHERE THERE IS DARKNESS, LIGHT; WHERE THERE IS SADNESS, JOY.”

THE HALLMARK OF HIS EFFORTS RESTS NOT IN THE NUMBERS AND DOLLARS BUT RATHER IN THE UPLIFTING OF THE HUMAN SPIRIT.

YES MY FRIENDS, OUR ANGEL IS A QUIET MAN WHO SPEAKS THROUGH BOLD ACTIONS. HE STANDS AS A BEACON OF HOPE, AIDING MANY DURING THEIR DIFFICULT JOURNEY. HE IS A KIND AND GENTLE MAN WHOSE LOVE STORY, PROMISE AND LEGACY SPEAK VOLUMES. HE IS A MAN FOR ALL SEASONS. HE IS A PRINCE AMONG MEN.

SOME PEOPLE COME INTO OUR LIVES AND STAY FOR A WHILE. OTHERS LEAVE IMPRINTS ON OUR HEARTS AND WE ARE NEVER EVER THE SAME.

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN PLEASE STAND WITH ME TO ACKNOWLEDGE OUR LIVING ANGEL 2010: MATTHEW W. NAKON, ESQ.

ALEXANDER F. ZOLLI, M.D.
MARCH 6, 2010