



Updated March 21, 2008 8:47AM

Ben's lasting image

By Orlan Love
The Gazette

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RIVERSIDE - An image of a beatific 12-year-old cancer victim who loved God, dogs and people filled 800 eyes with tears and raised \$8,500 for the Aiming for a Cure Foundation last weekend.

The pencil sketch of Ben Ries, who died of brain cancer in 2006, walking with his favorite German short-haired pointer near the old barn on his family's rural Central City acreage, with the hand of God extending toward him from a cloud, captured the spirit of the boy and the foundation, said Steve Ries, Ben's father and the founder of the annual effort to raise money for the Children's Hospital of Iowa.

The drawing by Riverside artist Kreig Jacque was bought during the Saturday night auction at the Sheraton Iowa City Hotel by Cedar Rapids dentist John McGrane, who donated it to Steve and Jodi Ries and their daughter, Rachel.

Jacque said the image occurred to him after he heard Ben's story during a visit to the Rieses' Top Gun Kennel. When Steve Ries asked him to donate a work of art for last weekend's auction, Jacque said he knew exactly what he wanted to do.

Jacque said it felt good to hear Ries say "you nailed it" and to see the sketch fetch \$8,500 for such a good cause.

Last weekend's fifth annual Aiming for a Cure event grossed nearly a quarter-million dollars for the Children's Hospital of Iowa, said Lisa Baum, director of the Children's Miracle Network, which raises money for the hospital.

"This event is truly a blanket of love for our pediatric cancer patients and their families," she said.

The Rieses, facing the prospect that Ben would likely die of cancer, started the effort five years ago as a way to give something to the University of Iowa institution that cared for Ben.

Ries, who raises and trains German short-haired pointers, organized the event around an activity he and Ben greatly enjoyed — pheasant hunting — and each year about 80 hunters pay to participate in guided pheasant hunts and sporting clay shoots at the Highland Hideaway Hunt Club near Riverside.

One of those hunters, Dr. Thomas Loew, a pediatric oncologist at Children's Hospital of Iowa, said he greatly admires the Rieses' ability to set aside their personal grief to help ensure other children don't have to die like Ben.

"The death of a child is the hardest thing anyone



(Orlan Love/The Gazette)

Participants in the fifth annual Aiming for a Cure fundraising event hunt pheasants Sunday at the Highland Hideaway Hunt Club near Riverside. From left are John McDonough of Hickory, N.C., Dwight Loew of Richmond, Va., Dr. Thomas Loew of Iowa City and Stephen Loew of Iowa City. They were among 80 people who hunted pheasants and shot sporting clays at the club as part of an effort to raise money for the Children's Hospital of Iowa, where Dr. Loew cares for cancer patients.



(Orlan Love/The Gazette)

With bird dogs on point in front of him, John McDonough of Hickory, N.C., shoulders his shotgun in preparation for a flushing pheasant Sunday during the fifth annual Aiming for a Cure fundraiser at the Highland Hideaway Hunt Club near Riverside.

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has to deal with. It breaks all the rules," said Loew, who helped care for Ben during his many hospital stays and had the daunting task of telling his family he was about to die.

Loew, who hunted last weekend with two brothers from Virginia and other relatives, said Aiming for a Cure is, from his standpoint, the ideal charity event. "It enables me to do something I love with people I love, and it raises money to help sick kids," he said.

Loew said doctors and researchers have made great progress in treating childhood cancer. But, he said, pointing to the Aiming for a Cure logo on his hat, "We want a 100 percent cure."

The shooting sports bring people together for the weekend and contribute to the event's proceeds, but the real money is raised through corporate donations and auctions of donated items at the banquet.

A customized "Dream Bucks II" print by Ankeny wildlife artist Larry Zach contributed \$2,700 to the live auction total of \$62,800, Baum said.

Corporate partners who donated at least \$3,000 each to the cause include Bob Dostal Memorial Golf Outing, EMC Corporation, Highland Hideaway Hunt Club, Hunter's Specialties, Johnson Controls, Kent Feed Native Dog Food, Mossy Oak Brand Camo, Overhead Door of Cedar Rapids and Iowa City, Proliant Health & Biologicals, Van Meter Industrial and Wal-Mart Stores.



This pencil sketch of 12-year-old cancer victim Ben Ries of rural Central City, by Riverside artist Kreig Jacque, brought \$8,500 at auction Saturday night to benefit the Aiming for a Cure Foundation.



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