

# Sunday Star Ledger

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## YOUNG CANCER PATIENTS GIVEN A NIGHT AT PROM

NEW BRUNSWICK — What started off as a wish fulfilled for one young person being treated for cancer has grown into a spectacular evening of pomp and pageantry for dozens of teen hematology/oncology patients. They won't soon forget their night at the prom.

Together, The Cancer Institute of New Jersey (CINJ), Embrace Kids Foundation, the Beauty Foundation and Beauty Foundation Friends (BFF's), recently hosted the first-ever "Hem/Onc" Prom for teen survivors and youngsters receiving treatment at CINJ or its Flagship Hospital, Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital (RWJUH) in New Brunswick. Dressed in the latest fashions, attendees aged 12 to 23 and their dates converged upon PSE&G Children's Specialized Hospital in New Brunswick for a

special night of dinner and dancing. CINJ is a Center of Excellence of UMDNJ-Robert Wood Johnson Medical School.

The idea started last year when a young patient wanted to attend his prom, but was hospitalized and could not go. Nurses and other team members from CINJ, RWJUH and Embrace Kids Foundation flew into action, quickly donning their own prom gowns, tiaras and tuxedos; decorating the patient's room; and providing music and food for a festive atmosphere.

"For all of us involved in putting it together, there wasn't a dry eye in the room, but for that youngster, it brought a smile so wide. We will never forget it," said CINJ Pediatric Assistant Nurse Manager, Dawn Yuhas, RN. "It was at that moment, we

all knew that we could be bringing that same feeling to so many of our patients on a much larger scale, thus the Hem/Onc Prom was born," added RWJUH Child Life Specialist Emma Neely.

"There are many rites of passage for a young person, including attending one's prom. When undergoing cancer treatment though, teens sometimes miss out on these very important milestones," said Embrace Kids Executive Director Glenn Enkins. "We are pleased to be a part of this collaborative effort to bring these youngsters such a memorable experience."

Jackie Ceraolo knows firsthand what it is like to miss such milestones. She is a founding member of BFF's — the teen division of the Beauty Foundation, which raises money for families

fighting cancer. Now 15 and cancer free, she was diagnosed two years ago with a rare form of bone cancer called osteosarcoma. While she was undergoing treatment, her friends were preparing for eighth-grade graduation and all of the celebrations that went with it. She encouraged the involvement of BFF's because she wanted to make sure that other kids weren't 'missing out' on such an important time in their lives. "While an eighth-grade dance or the prom is just one night in the life of a teen, it could be the most meaningful thing to them at that moment. Every teen deserves to have that special night, and we at BFF's were happy to make some dreams come true."

The teens involved in BFF's even helped to provide prom attire for some attendees by collecting a few hundred donated dresses, suits and accessories in the weeks leading up to the event.

Jackie's mother Lori Ceraolo is on the Board of Directors for the Beauty Foundation, which helped secure donations of prizes and entertainment for the evening. "In caring for a child with cancer, their emotional well-being is just as important as their treatment needs. By holding this event, these kids had a chance to do exactly what their peers are doing while being in a comfortable and familiar environment. Without the generosity of the community and the dedication of the professionals who care for these kids, this event would not have been a success," she said.

Along with prizes, DJ entertainment, and an opportunity to have prom portraits taken, attendees had the fun of seeing their nurses, doctors and other care professionals decked out as part of the prom court.



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Cancer survivor Kristin DeMauro, center, takes part in the Embrace Kids Prom at Children's Specialized Hospital. The prom was for former and current patients ages 12 to 23 and their dates and included dinner, dancing and entertainment. Health care professionals also wore prom attire to attend the event.