

# Browns turn personal trial into way of helping others

BY WILLIAM MANSELL

Alex Brown looks like your average 12-year-old. He's interested in sports and has recently picked up the guitar. He is a shy kid who's all smiles. However, Alex has a problem that your average 12-year-old does not.

He has a rare form of cancer called ganglioglioma. This disease accounts for only 1.4 percent of brain tumors in the U.S. today. It's an understatement to say that the tumor has changed life for Alex and the rest of his family.

"I woke up one morning and I have a clock next to my bed and I looked to see what time it was, but I was dizzy and I couldn't find it," Alex said.

"What do people do that don't have money?"

Nancy Brown

And that is the last thing Alex remembers before waking up in the hospital.

Alex's dad, Artie Brown, said he heard a loud noise coming from upstairs that morning, which was unusual at such an early hour on a Sunday. He climbed the stairs to find Alex standing in the hallway "kind of in a daze."

"I remember it like it was yesterday," Artie said. "I'll never get it out of my mind. It was a growing experience for us all. I mean, you don't ever prepare yourself for your child being sick."

Artie tapped Alex, who did not respond.

"So he picks him up and carries him downstairs screaming for me while I'm still sound asleep," said Alex's mother, Nancy Brown. "I sit up and he lays Alex on the bed and he's completely stiff and then he started going in a full-blown seizure."

After Alex was rushed to the hospital where he underwent several tests, doctors determined Alex had a brain tumor.

"From that point we knew that surgery was the method of treatment," Nancy said. "We did some exploring and interviewed a couple of doctors and eventually we went to Duke [University Medical Center in Durham, N.C.] and [Alex] had two surgeries in September of 2006."

It was at that point the Browns realized how much it was going to cost them to pay for all of the medical bills that were going to accumulate.

"My husband has a very good job with very good

health insurance benefits," Nancy said. "It didn't cause us to be in the red, but we came pretty close, and this is someone with a professional job with very good health insurance. What about someone who doesn't have money or health insurance? We would say to one another, 'What would these people do?'"

The Browns decided to translate that thought into action. In the spring of 2007, they created Team Brown, an official 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization.

"Basically after going through it ourselves, we decided that we wanted to be able to help other families out," Nancy said, "...families who are going through a medical emergency, to help curb some of the expenses. Even people with full insurance and benefits have co-pays that can still be \$800 or \$1,000. What do people do that don't have money?"

Team Brown does all of its own fundraising. A family member desperate for emergency medical assistance can visit [www.teambrown.org](http://www.teambrown.org) to apply for aid. The organization allocates funds based on need and availability of money.

Team Brown has helped people pay their mortgages and rent, and it has even supplied someone with a cell phone so the person could stay in touch with family members during a child's treatment for cancer.

"It's the middle-income or lower-middle-income families who struggle. A medical emergency just slams you," Nancy said. "You're going through something emotional



The Brown family with mom and dad Artie and Nancy and the boys (l. to r.) 12-year-old Alex with Luke, 5, and Jake, 8.

as it is; for us to help lessen some of the financial burdens, it's one less thing for them to worry about."

One factor very important to Nancy and Artie Brown is keeping the organization's work local. Artie and Nancy say they feel it's important to help out those in the com-

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## Local groups showing their support for Making Strides

Making Strides Against Breast Cancer events are non-competitive walks uniting people of all ages with a common goal to fight breast cancer and save lives. Chances are, most people have been affected by breast cancer in some way, and Making Strides gives the power to fight back and make a difference.

Making Strides events have no registration fee and no fundraising minimum. Anyone raising \$100 or more is eligible to receive a Making Strides T-shirt. There are fun and easy-to-use online tools that allow walkers to personalize their experience. Whether they upload a photo, tell their story, or add their fundraising thermometer to their Facebook page, they can make this experience their own and share with others the reason for making strides.

The Sarasota fund-raiser takes place Oct 24 at the Sarasota Polo Grounds; registration starts at 7:30 a.m. walk begins at 9 a.m.

Visit [www.cancer.org/makingstrides](http://www.cancer.org/makingstrides) to register and/or make a donation.



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# Who gets breast cancer?

Excluding cancers of the skin, breast cancer is the most common cancer among women, accounting for nearly one in four cancers diagnosed in U.S. women.

Men are generally at low risk for developing breast cancer; however, they should report any change in their breasts to a physician.

Breast cancer incidence and death rates generally increase with age. During 2002-2006, 95 percent of new cases and 97 percent of breast cancer deaths occurred in women ages 40 and older.

During that same period, women ages 20-24 had the lowest incidence rate, 1.4 cases per 100,000 women; women ages 75-79 had the highest incidence rate, 441.9 cases per 100,000.

The decrease in incidence rates that occurs in women ages 80 and older may

reflect lower rates of screening, the detection of cancers by mammography before age 80, and/or incomplete detection.

During 2002-2006, the median age at the time of breast cancer diagnosis was 61 years. This means that 50 percent of women who developed breast cancer were age 61 or younger at the time of diagnosis.

White women have a higher incidence of breast cancer than African American women, beginning at age 45. In contrast, African American women have a higher incidence rate before age 45 and are more likely to die from breast cancer at every age.

Despite higher incidence rates, breast cancer death rates are lower among white women than among African American women. Breast cancer death rates among white women range from 21.7 in Hawaii to 27.3 in New Jersey.

## SASSY HAIR WORKING FOR THE CAUSE

On Sunday, Oct. 18, Sassy Hair at 1285 S. Tamiami Trail in the Midtown Plaza, will be hosting a "Day of Beauty" to benefit Breast Cancer Awareness. All hair, nail, massage services and products will be discounted 20 percent. Prizes, refreshments and a jewelry trunk show will be apart of the activities for that day.

Call 941-366-6525 to schedule appointments.

Sassy has already pledged \$1 from every item sold from both Midtown Plaza and Siesta Key locations from the month of September toward Breast Cancer Awareness. Sassy also participated in "Viva La Pink," a Breast Cancer Awareness benefit hosted by Foxy Lady on Siesta Key by doing the hair, makeup and nails on all the models for the fashion show.

## HELP FROM SARASOTA ALLSTATE AGENTS

The Browns are not alone in working to raise money for Team Brown. A local Allstate firm, Ted Todd Insurance, and its agents are contributing funds to the organization. For one example, Ted Todd Insurance is donating to Team Brown a portion of all commissions from purchases of a cancer insurance policy the agency offers.

One of the agents directly helping the Browns is Deborah Stone, who is running marathons as a means of fundraising. Last year she participated in the New York City Marathon and was personally able to raise \$3,500. To date, agents at the Ted Todd office have been able to bring in \$15,000 for the fund. "It makes sense for me to run," Stone said. "Since they are a smaller not-for-profit, I like how they reach out to individual families, and I like how you have a connection with the family."

Stone and two others, Ted Todd and Kagan Cooksley, are also planning to run for Team Brown in a half marathon in November. The three have planned runs in December and January as well.

"These patients are so positive and have these remarkable attitudes," Stone said. "I feel like making time out of my busy schedule; it's something I have to do."

▼ Anyone interested in more information about Team Brown, or in making a contribution, may visit [www.teambrown.org](http://www.teambrown.org).

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community. The added benefit for them is that they might really get to know the people they are assisting.

Yet even as they are doing good work in the Sarasota area, they remain worried about Alex's cancer. "His type of tumor - it tends to grow slow, but it grows in spurts," Nancy said. "After the last scan it had doubled in size after no growth for over a year."

Nancy said that Alex will more than likely begin chemotherapy within the

next 12 months.

Although his tumor has grown recently, Alex is asymptomatic. He's just trying to lead as normal a life as possible.

"Here's a child who's limited in sports and so he's decided to learn how to play guitar," Artie said. "He's playing the sax in school and now he's an aspiring musician."

"I don't really want to tell everyone in the world about this," Alex said. "I want to be treated as a normal kid."

"He doesn't want to be known as 'the kid with the brain tumor'; he just wants to be known as 'Alex,'" Nancy said.



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