

# On A Mission

by Georgia Rivas



Lake Mary neighbors come together to help cancer patients in need

On his wife's birthday in December 2015, Lake Mary resident Randy Krepfle was diagnosed with stage 4 head and neck cancer.

"I didn't have much of anything – in terms of health problems – my whole life, but this was bad right off the bat," says Randy. "My first phone call was to my longtime neighbor and friend Dr. Gregory Ortega, who is an oncologist. His exact words to me were, 'We'll do whatever we have to do [to beat this].' He was upfront that this was going to be hard and the treatment would be intense – and it was."

Randy endured 40 treatments of radiation and chemotherapy. The radiation treatment was so severe it damaged his throat, making it extremely difficult to speak or eat for months on end. Randy lost 95 pounds, becoming almost unrecognizable to his own family and friends. He could barely whisper or take a few steps without fainting, and he was forced to relearn how to swallow and speak.

"I've always had a positive spirit, and I really did not realize how sick I was," recalls Randy. "It was terrible, but I was still lucky. I had so much help and support. During my treatment, I observed so many people who couldn't pay a bill and couldn't get to their treatment because they had no transportation or family to help. Some cancer patients were so sick they couldn't fill out their own paperwork. It was such an eyeopener. So many people are alone. I had to find a way to help them."

Randy, who is now cancer-free and in much better health, cofounded Mission Blue Foundation with the same neighbor who helped him from the very beginning, Dr. Ortega. Though their nonprofit is still in its infancy, this cancer survivor and cancer doctor are channeling their own experiences to provide direct medical assistance, transportation services, food, and clothing to cancer patients in need.

Serving as president of Mission Blue Foundation is Karen Blevins, another one of Randy's Lake Mary neighbors.

"After Randy had cancer and I learned what he and Dr. Ortega were doing, I had a desire to help," says Karen. "We've all been hit personally by cancer. Mission Blue Foundation is focused on helping local cancer patients with even their most basic needs."

Last year, in partnership with Mercedes-Benz of North Orlando, Mission Blue Foundation hosted its first major fundraising event featuring a drawing for a prepaid lease on a brand-new Mercedes-Benz.



Mission Blue Foundation founders Dr. Gregory Ortega and Randy Krepfle with the Rawls family. The organization continues to help little Aidan who is battling stage 4 high-risk neuroblastoma.



The Mission Blue Foundation's second annual fundraiser and Mercedes-Benz drawing will take place on Friday, March 29, at 6:00 p.m. at Mercedes-Benz of North Orlando in Sanford. For more information, visit [MissionBlueFoundation.org](http://MissionBlueFoundation.org).



Organization president Karen Blevins with the 2019 Mercedes-Benz C300. One lucky person will win a prepaid lease on this vehicle at Mission Blue Foundation's second annual fundraiser on Friday, March 29, at 6:00 p.m.

"I get my car serviced there, so one day I just walked in and told the general manager, Walter Grundorf, about Mission Blue," says Randy. "He was happy to help and be a sponsor. Lots of other local businesses were, too. The response has been amazing."

Local jewelry store Park Jewelers also donated a diamond necklace as a prize, while other businesses, like Randy's favorite restaurants, stepped up to provide gift baskets and sponsorships.

The Mission Blue Foundation has helped patients of all ages including Aidan Rawls, a four-year-old from Apopka who is battling stage 4 high-risk neuroblastoma, and a man named Byron Dupree Hosey.

"Mission Blue blessed me with the ability to feed myself and pay medical bills during this difficult time," says Byron. "I am extremely thankful to Randy for sharing his story with me as well as to Mission Blue for reaching out and helping me when I needed it most."

Dr. Ortega and Randy's hope is to eventually raise enough money to buy a fleet of transportation vans to address what they believe is one of the biggest challenges for cancer patients.

"When you have cancer, you end up going to so many different doctors who treat different parts of the body," says Randy. "Getting from one appointment to the next can really make a difference for a cancer patient."