

# University of Virginia Children's Hospital

For serious health issues, Valley families have nearby option.

Story and photos by Preston Knight, SVEC Writer

The mention of rabies draws a smile from Anne Gordon every time. When your 7-year-old son is stuck in a hospital bed for an extended period because of leukemia, she learned that one can find comic relief in the most unlikely places. For Anne, it was a reference to a far-less-concerning disease.

It was about 13 years ago when a family friend's son, who was the same age as Anne's son, Jack, informed his teacher that his buddy was terribly sick.

"I think he has rabies," Anne, of Mount Sidney in Augusta County, says, recalling what the boy told the teacher. "When I heard that story, I thought my face was going to crack. That was the first time I had laughed since Jack was sick."

Jack Gordon, Anne's youngest of two children, is now 20 years old and cancer — and rabies — free. He is working toward a master's degree in accounting at James Madison University.

While the family's nightmare of watching a child go through intense medical care is now past, the reason Jack



PHOTO COURTESY OF ANNE GORDON

survived remains at the forefront of their minds. It's called the University of Virginia Children's Hospital in Charlottesville. "I'm so grateful. I'm so, so, so grateful for that hospital," Anne says. "We're just so fortunate to have that resource close to us."



Information shared at a fundraising event to benefit the University of Virginia Children's Hospital included facts about how far families travel for healthcare. One, from Iselin, New Jersey, drove six hours more than 100 times for a 5-year-old girl with a congenital blood disease.

Raising Awareness

In late February, Anne and her husband, Garry Gordon, were among the hosts of a fundraising event for the hospital at the Valley Pike Farm Market in Weyers Cave. Anne is a member of the UVA Children's Hospital Committee and its only representative from the Shenandoah Valley.

## Raising Awareness

The Gordons contacted other families who have had long hospital stays in Charlottesville to help organize the event, which featured Dr. Daniel "Trey" Lee, who is renowned for his pediatric cancer research at UVA. Each family, in turn, then invited friends who they believed would be

supportive of the mission to raise money for the hospital. About 60 people attended. "I'm very unapologetic about asking for money," Anne says. She seeks to drive home two major points to anyone who will listen: You never know when a child or grandchild will need treatment for a serious illness or injury, and Charlottesville is not too far away for care. The hospital has more than 123,000

## TONIGHT AT UVA CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL:

- 92 Children are spending the night.
- 44 Nurses are working the night shift.
- 16 Doctors are working the night shift.
- 36 Other healthcare team members working the night shift.
- 50 Children in the NICU.
- 13 Children in the PICU.
- Children fighting for their lives.

THE BATTLE IS REAL.



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pediatric visits annually, and more than 5,300 patient families drive two hours or more to receive care in Charlottesville. Throughout most of the Valley, and certainly in Gordon's home of Augusta County, that commute is much shorter.

"It is our children's hospital even though it is in Charlottesville," she says. "We're not trying to take business away from local doctors. We recognize kids are best served at home, but when the issue reaches a certain level, you've got to go to a place like that. There are so many people here with children who have been saved."

### Blessings in Disguise

Jack, then a first-grade student who enjoyed playing baseball, woke up in the middle of the night complaining of leg pain after a game. It was unlike any ailment the Gordons had seen in their son before, but with a history of bad backs in the family, they figured something hereditary was in play.

They visited their pediatrician and started Jack on muscle relaxers and pain medication. The next day, though, the severity of the pain had not subsided, and the same doctor sent the family to Charlottesville. Jack was admitted on a Saturday and by Tuesday was diagnosed with acute lymphoblastic leukemia. He stayed for two weeks.

Over the next two and a half years of treatment, he had to stay a total of six weekends in Charlottesville. He actually seemed to enjoy the experience, which speaks to the accommodating nature of the staff, his mother says.

"The very last weekend we knew he had to be there, he was probably 9, and he says, 'Maybe I'll get sick again so I can come back,'" she says. "What a blessing that this was his memory of it."

Jack was declared cancer-free following treatment and has had no problems since, but the hospital will check him annually until he's 25.

"You take it one minute at a time sometimes, but it came with a lot of blessings," Anne says. "We don't get bogged down by little things. If nobody's dead, nobody's dying, we can get through it. The only things that matter are love and health, when you come down to it."

### New Transplant Unit

Now is a particularly exciting time for UVA Children's Hospital. Dr. Lee, who arrived in Charlottesville from the National Institutes of Health, is taking the lead in preparing the opening of a new bone-marrow transplant unit, which is expected to open in the coming months.

In an article for Physician Resource, a news-and-information website of the University of Virginia Health System, he

says, "We believe that Virginians of any age who need a bone-marrow transplant should not have to leave the state."

Lee is also researching an investigational immunotherapy that involves programming a patient's own immune systems to fight their cancer. The new therapy is intended to treat brain tumors, too.

"This is truly a new frontier," Lee said at the Valley Pike event in February. "This is new hope for them."

UVA is the only place in the commonwealth where this investigational therapy is offered, according to the hospital.

"The best cancer institutions in the country combine excellent clinical care, clinical research and basic science research and invest in all the support infrastructure needed to run these programs well and treat very complicated patients," Lee says in the Physician Resource article. "In my view, UVA is part of that group."

You will hear no argument from Anne.

"It is such a great resource. I hope that someone's kids and grandkids never have to go there, but if there is a serious illness or injury, that is where they are going to go," she says. "That is our children's hospital."

For more information on how to support University of Virginia Children's Hospital, please contact Polly Hunter, director of development, at 1-800-297-0102, or visit [healthfoundation.virginia.edu](http://healthfoundation.virginia.edu).

## Save the Date!

# SVEC Ribbon Cutting/Open House – New SVEC Rockingham Complex

**Saturday, Sept. 8, 2018**

**Ribbon Cutting: 2-3 p.m.**

**Open House: 3-5 p.m.**

**Corner of Rte. 11 and  
Oakwood Drive  
(180 Oakwood Drive, Rockingham, VA)**

**Look for more  
information to follow!**

