



## MaDee Project supports children's fight with cancer.

by Preston Knight, SVEC Writer

Under an unseasonably, if not unreasonably, hot sun in early September, music played, drinks flowed and food trucks offering anything your taste buds could desire lined the grassy field at the Augusta Expo in Fishersville.

If this is what attacking something with tenacity looks like, then MaDee Nicole Boxler would be proud.

The Virginia Food Truck Battle is the signature fundraising event for the MaDee Project, an Augusta County-based nonprofit organization that provides support to pediatric cancer patients and their families in the region. Held the first Sunday in September, the event showcased local and state talent, brews and fare, carrying out the project's objective of being community driven in its philanthropy.

There's no doubt that MaDee, who was 22 when she died in 2010 from complications from Hodgkin's lymphoma, would be delighted to see the event and its host organization growing bigger and better each year, said her sister, Abby Boxler-Arey.

"She was tenacious in her fight. MaDee lived life every day," she said. "We formed the MaDee Project because it was just important to our family to carry on her legacy every day. We're not just going to be sad. Let's turn this into something good."



The MaDee Project holds fundraising events throughout the year in support of families with children diagnosed with cancer. For the remainder of 2018, they are:

Saturday, Nov. 25, Chili Cook-Off, Basic City Brewery

Saturday, Dec. 8, Breakfast with Santa, Stonewall Jackson Hotel and Conference Center, 8:30 a.m. and 10:30 a.m.

### Needs-Based Assistance

Founded in October 2010, the MaDee Project relies heavily on referrals, particularly from the University of Virginia Children's Hospital. Families living in Augusta County or any of its surrounding counties and cities are eligible to seek assistance from the organization. Money is allocated based on need and given only after MaDee's mother, Tamara Talley Campbell, conducts an interview.

As of late September, the project was assisting 22 local families, which is a number that fluctuates throughout the year. Funds are designated only for cancer patients up to 22 years old and their families, but may be used for any number of expenses, such as travel, medicine or bills.

Boxler-Arey said her family understands all too well the financial hardships that can hit a family with a child diagnosed with cancer. Additionally, the organization supports funding national research in hopes of preventing pediatric cancer from affecting more children and, it is hoped, to find a cure for the disease.

"MaDee was passionate about kids," Boxler-Arey said.

### Eternal Thanks

MaDee's battle with cancer lasted about a year and a half, from her sophomore year at Roanoke College to just after she completed her studies. A Fort Defiance High School graduate, she pegged her dream job as working for the FBI, her sister said.

MaDee's life is captured in a book titled *Dancing in the Rain* by Kimberly Fowler. It pulls from her diaries, journals, private letters and memories from her family and friends. MaDee started working on it when she was diagnosed with cancer at 20. The book is available through the organization.

The inspirational story is in one way a call for families who need assistance to realize they aren't alone, but also serves to inspire people who may not currently be

The Virginia Food Truck Battle is the signature fundraising event for the MaDee Project, an Augusta County-based nonprofit organization that provides support to pediatric cancer patients and their families in the region. It was held this year the first Sunday in September at the Augusta Expo. Inset: MaDee Nicole Boxler was 22 when she died in 2010 from complications from Hodgkin's lymphoma. Photo courtesy of MaDee Project.

affected by pediatric cancer to step up. The disease can hit anyone at any given time. In MaDee's case, there was no family history to suggest she might become sick.

That shock reverberates, but with an organization like the MaDee Project, its impact can be lessened. Jessica Staples, a local mother who provided her family's story to share at the Food Truck Battle, will attest to it.

"Our world turned upside down in December when [my son] Parker was diagnosed with Burkitt's lymphoma. It was one of those moments that you felt couldn't possibly be happening. This happened to other people, not us. It must be a nightmare and we were going to wake up. But, we didn't wake up. The nightmare became our reality," she wrote to the MaDee Project. "One of the most amazing things we learned and what helped sustain us through this ordeal was the love and support from family, friends and total strangers. The outpouring of love was so real and so palpable.

"This love carried us through emotionally, physically and financially. We can't thank the MaDee Project enough for the love and support provided to us."

The MaDee Project is well positioned to continue to make an impact locally.

"It's really important to us to serve the people who live here in the Valley," Boxler-Arey said. "When my sister was sick, our community did so much for our family. It's important for us to give back."

For more information or if you're interested in volunteering for the organization, please visit [themadeeproject.com](http://themadeeproject.com).