



GILDAGRAM

A free, non-profit support community for anyone touched by cancer.

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Olivia Newton-John Joins Gilda's Club Supporters

"*H*opelessly devoted" Gilda's Club Northern New Jersey supporters enjoyed a spectacular performance by Olivia Newton-John and a private "meet-and-greet" gathering with the singer on Sunday night, January 12, at Englewood's John Harms Center for the Arts. Gilda's Club Northern New Jersey raised about \$12,000 by selling VIP tickets to the performance, which included the post-performance reception.

A recipient of many music awards, Ms. Newton-John has had an extensive career as a singer/songwriter and actress, best known for starring in the acclaimed musical *Grease* with John Travolta. During the 90-minute concert at the John Harms Center, she sang several of her hits including "Magic," "Suddenly," "Xanadu," and "Not Gonna Give In To It," which refers to her breast cancer experience 10 years ago. She ended her show with various songs from *Grease* and surprised the audience by calling Didi Conn, who played Frenchie, on stage to sing "Summer Nights."

Ms. Newton-John's meeting with supporters after



Pictured with Olivia Newton-John are Gilda's Club board members (l-r): Bernie Koster, Angelica Berrie, Lee Langbaum, Debbie Aronson, and Penni Silver Zola

the concert was her special "gift" to the organization. In the early 90s, Ms. Newton-John was treated for breast cancer and since then has helped raise awareness about the disease by supporting various organizations. She was most recently named Woman of the Year by the American Red Cross.

During the reception, the world-famous performer praised Gilda's Club. "There wasn't a facility like Gilda's Club when I was sick," notes Ms. Newton-John. "I think it's great." She added that she believes it is important for people living with cancer to obtain the support they need and mentioned that she plans to establish a facility similar to Gilda's Club in Australia.

Ms. Newton-John also signed autographs for young fans and a ticket stub for a woman whose friend with cancer could not attend because she was too ill.

She answered questions from the crowd regarding upcoming albums and the meanings behind certain songs. When many called her an inspiration, she responded, "You must believe that you are, and that is what will get you through." One devoted fan handed a bouquet of roses to her, which Ms. Newton-John said she was delighted to accept. ■



*Ms. Newton-John with Gilda's Club
Executive Director Betsy Davison*



noogie and landy
a magical place
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From the Executive Director

Gilda's Club Northern New Jersey is a special place.

There is nothing like it anywhere in Northern New Jersey. Since our opening, we have provided emotional and social support to more than 1,000 men, women, and children who are living with cancer. They turn to Gilda's Club for many reasons. When they do, they enter a thriving clubhouse, with vast program offerings, and a community of members who are there to help them live with cancer, whatever the outcome. And all this happens free of charge. No one is ever asked to pay a fee.

Many of the events that enable us to run our program without charging fees are profiled in this



newsletter. While these events are designed to raise the money we need for our programming, they also build the strong sense of community that permeates Gilda's Club Northern New Jersey. We've also hosted other events, such as Spa Day, the NoogieLand carnival, and Noogiefest that remind us to relax, enjoy, and have fun.

None of these activities would be possible without the devotion of our donors and volunteers, who give so generously of their money and time. Without their continued support, the activities you will read about would not take place. Our dedicated board members – who are so filled with energy and vision – are also committed to making sure Gilda's Club continues to be a supportive environment for those touched by cancer. And, we have a small, dedicated staff whose untiring commitment to Gilda's Club, ongoing support of the nearly 10,000 member visits each year, and continuing devotion to making our clubhouse a warm, welcoming place in the lives of our members are a testament to their passion and professionalism.

As this goes to print, Tony Mitchell has resigned his position as president of the Gilda's Club NNJ Board of Trustees. Through his leadership we were able to further our efforts to serve the Gilda's Club community. This is demonstrated through our plans to expand with a satellite clubhouse in western New Jersey. We are extremely grateful for Tony's role at Gilda's Club and wish him and his family well in the future. Jeff Warren has been vice president of the board and we welcome him as he takes the reins as Gilda's Club NNJ's interim president. Under his skillful guidance, the momentum that has begun will continue.

On behalf of the entire Gilda's Club family, I thank you for your support and for caring enough to make a difference. I look forward to meeting each and every one of you and would ask you to stop by and say hello when you are at the clubhouse. Thank you again. ■

Betsy Davison
Executive Director

A "Most Unforgettable Person"

When I was growing up, my favorite feature in *Reader's Digest* was the "Most Unforgettable Person" article each month. Russ Berrie was that kind of man.

Russ began his business in a rented one car garage in Palisades Park, New Jersey. Using a work ethic he learned from his parents and his talents as a consummate salesman who listened carefully to his customers, Russ built a business that became an international success.

The world identified Russ by his teddy bears and trolls, but he was so much more. He was smart, and kind, and funny, and loyal. Although he met with world leaders from presidents to the Pope, he never lost sight of who he really was.

Russ was passionate about things he loved, including the opera and sports. He was an astute fan of both and a knowledgeable historian about all sorts of sports trivia. I am certain that my credibility with him was cemented when I could join a discussion about Carl Braun or Preacher Roe.

He went about his philanthropy with the same zeal that he demonstrated in his business successes. He truly loved people and was always open to ideas that would improve their lives. Russ was a renowned leader in

Editor's Note: Russ Berrie, 69, died unexpectedly of heart failure on Christmas day 2002 at his home.

supporting the war on diabetes, humanism in medicine, interreligious understanding, the arts, education, and world peace.

The wisdom of Russ' giving was exemplified by the donations he made in the form of matching grants that would often double or triple their effectiveness. But there were also innumerable gifts and grants that were known only to the recipients. He initiated a financial awards program to recognize local unsung heroes who make a difference in their own communities.

After the very first meeting to explore the possibility of bringing a Gilda's Club to New Jersey, Russ quietly expressed his doubts that we would succeed. But once he saw the vision and extraordinary efforts of Angelica and the rest of the initial team, he provided a million-dollar challenge grant. That grant not only gave us a jump start to success; it also gave our fledgling group the ability to build a donor base of other major contributors to help sustain us into the future.

I will never forget the night of the 'hard hat' party when the clubhouse was under construction. Angelica was speaking to the assembled group about moving the campaign forward. Russ had a grin from ear to ear



Russ and Angelica Berrie

and a twinkle in his eye. And, at the opening of our signature red door, no one took more delight and pride than our original Doubting Thomas, who had become a staunch believer.

Russ loved people...and all of us who loved him are left with countless wonderful memories. ■

Debbie Aronson
Founding President
Gilda's Club Northern New Jersey

Deborah Aronson Honored

as Founding President of Gilda's Club Northern New Jersey

On May 14, 2002, with more than 400 people in attendance, Livingston's Crystal Plaza was the venue for a Sports Legends Dinner and Auction, a fundraising event which also honored Deborah Aronson, of Englewood, for her accomplishments as founding president of Gilda's Club Northern New Jersey. Mrs. Aronson received the "Gilda's Club Pathfinder" award, presented by Joanna Bull, co-founder of Gilda's Club Worldwide, for her work in bringing the community together to open the first signature red door of Gilda's Club in New Jersey.

Mrs. Aronson, along with a group of talented and dedicated community members and philanthropists, worked to form a Gilda's Club in Northern New Jersey after hearing Ms. Bull speak at a fundraiser.

"Debbie Aronson led the way in establishing, funding, and bringing Gilda's Club Northern New Jersey to fruition," says Betsy Davison, Gilda's Club Northern New Jersey executive director.

"Without her dedication, determination, non-profit experience, and inspiration, Gilda's Club Northern New Jersey would still be just a dream. Now with



Debbie Aronson with Bruce Beck (standing) Seated, left to right, Bobby Thomson, Ralph Branca, and Albert King



Debbie Aronson (r) received the Pathfinder Award from Joanna Bull, co-founder of Gilda's Club Worldwide.

more than 1,000 members, Gilda's Club Northern New Jersey is a reality."

The Sports Legends Dinner and Auction was headlined by former baseball players Ralph Branca, Bobby Thomson, and Frank Torre. Also attending were former New Jersey Nets player Albert King, former New York Jet Bruce Harper, and former New York Liberty player Kym Hampton. The evening's event was emceed by sportscaster Bruce Beck.

"A sports theme was chosen to help send the message that men – not only women and children – are welcomed as members at Gilda's Club," said Mrs. Aronson. "Because Gilda's Club is named for *Saturday Night Live* comedian Gilda Radner, people think it is only for women with cancer. This is not true; Gilda's Club is for everyone living with cancer, as well as their families and friends."

Honorary chair of the event was Robert Becker, president and chief executive officer of NRT, Inc. NRT and Coldwell Banker have contributed to the success of Gilda's Club through the outstanding fundraising efforts of their sales representatives and community offices. Gala co-chairs for the evening were Elaine and Myron Adler of Franklin Lakes, Ronni Janoff and Barry Weinstein of Short Hills, and Emily and Sam Mann of Englewood. The Dinner and Auction Committee members created a comfortable and fun atmosphere featuring a silent and live auction that included popular trading cards, signed posters, South Sea pearls, tickets to Yankee games, Derek Jeter baseballs, golf games with sport celebrities, and much more. ■

Noogieland:

A Magical Place for Kids and Adults Alike

Gilda's Club Northern New Jersey's Noogieland program has grown in leaps and bounds! The first-ever Noogieland Carnival was held on July 20, when the clubhouse came alive with carnival-style decorations, including murals, balloons, an ice cream cart, hot dog stand, and even an old-fashioned popcorn maker. Children enjoyed getting their faces painted, tie-dying a T-shirt, creating a sand-art bottle, winning prizes, participating in a magic show, and taking home a goldfish. One of the most popular games of the day was "Pin the Bow on Gilda," adapted from everyone's favorite "Pin the Tail on the Donkey!" A crowd of nearly 100 people wandered through the clubhouse enjoying activities and games while mingling with Dolly the Clown and Elmo. We look forward to making this an annual summer event!

Many thanks to Callahan's for providing delicious hot dogs and buns, Newman's Fish Food and Animations for donating give-away prizes; Dolly, Colors, Ollie, and Kandi for dazzling us with their magic and fun-loving spirits; Elmo for adding to the festivities; and The Kaplan Foundation, whose support helped make this event a reality.

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Spider webs, ghosts, goblins, and pumpkins filled the clubhouse for the third annual Noogiefest, held on October 26. Each room was decorated for this wonderfully spooky evening, attended by more than 150 people in costume and ready for a night of Halloween tricks and treats. Kids were able to decorate their own trick-or-treat bag, have their caricature created, play Halloween Bowl or Pass the Pumpkin, and have their "animal spirit card" read by Jeannie the Gypsy! Everyone enjoyed pumpkin-shaped sandwiches and cider while spending time with Minnie Mouse and the New Jersey Devils' team mascot. No child left the clubhouse without a pumpkin, candy, and prizes in tow!

Special thanks to Target, Le Moine's Farm, Lupardi's Nursery, and Willow Run Nursery for providing decorative materials for the clubhouse. Thanks to King's Supermarket, ChopStix, Geronimo's, the River Edge Junior Women's Club, and St. Cassian's School's eighth-graders for supplying delicious treats. Take-home prizes were contributed by Russ Berrie & Co.,

the New York City Comic Book Museum, and the Garfield Senior Activity Center. Thanks to Angelica Berrie and Frances Goldstein for their financial support of this event, and to all our special guests who joined us to share in the spirit

of Noogiefest! Cheers to JP Morgan Chase for their financial support, decorating the clubhouse, and for helping at the party for the second year in a row! ■

Mickey Mouse and the New Jersey Devils team mascot were among the special visitors at the 3rd annual Noogiefest Celebration.



Volunteer Happenings

Just one glimpse at our monthly calendar illustrates how many dedicated, committed, and talented volunteers donate their time to Gilda's Club Northern New Jersey. Our volunteers are a diverse group of people who facilitate workshops, volunteer in Noogieland, help with our monthly mailing, and much, much more. Without their commitment, we would not be able to continue the mission of Gilda's Club. We have developed a volunteer calendar that highlights all the monthly opportunities available. In addition, Volunteer Connections meets monthly and gives volunteers an opportunity to share personal Gilda's Club experiences.

On April 30th, our volunteers will again be honored at an annual appreciation gathering. Last year, more than 50 volunteers attended and received a certificate of appreciation. We continue to be amazed and are proud of the dedication, passion, and love that our volunteers bring to Gilda's Club Northern New Jersey. The red door opens hundreds of times each month because of them. ■

All About Membership



To help Gilda's Club members create and structure their customized membership, club activities are organized into three core components in the Basic III "Plus" program. These components include:

Basic I: Support and Networking Groups

Wellness Groups are for those who are living with cancer and **Family Groups** are for family and friends. Groups meet weekly for social and emotional support and are facilitated by licensed mental health professionals.

Networking Groups meet monthly and bring together members who have a common interest. At each group meeting, members share practical advice and problem solve. Topics may include Men Who Love Women with Cancer, Living Solo with Cancer, Cancer in your 20s and 30s, and Parenting While Living with Cancer.

Basic II: Lectures and Workshops

Lectures and workshops offer Gilda's Club members activities that provide opportunities for acquiring new skills, tools, information, and techniques to learn how to live with cancer. Specialists share their current findings on cancer, strategies for partnership with the medical team, and offer ways to enhance self-understanding through classes on relaxation techniques, Tai Chi, meditation, gentle yoga, visualization, painting, cooking, journal writing, and more.

Basic III: Social Activities

Fellow members, families, and friends gather in Gilda's Club's community room for potluck suppers as well as joke fests, karaoke nights, and other gatherings to celebrate life. Having a place to gather with people who have similar experiences builds community.

There are also three supplements to the Basic III, which constitutes the "Plus:"

Noogieland is our special playroom and program for children and teens who have been touched by cancer. This includes children who are living with cancer themselves, who have family members living with cancer, or who have lost someone to cancer. Noogieland is a cheerful and bright playroom where children can play with other children who share their experiences. Children's support groups are offered on a weekly basis, and the children participate in an art-based activity that targets the cancer experience. Teen Scene is a monthly opportunity for teens 13 to 18 years of age to gather together around a structured activity and share their own experiences of having been touched by cancer.

Family Focus is a meeting called for by a member in which they invite the people they consider their family to the clubhouse to gather together and open a dialogue about the cancer experience. It provides a way to emotionally support each other in living with cancer.

Team Convene is when members invite their support system to the clubhouse to take part in a strategic planning meeting to sort out plans, assign tasks, and problem solve.

Perspectives, Helping

Hands, and Discovery (ph&d®) offers support for those living long-term with cancer, whether they are living with cancer themselves and are more than one year out of treatment or have lost someone to cancer. ■

Gilda's Club Going Strong

Gilda's Club Northern New Jersey has grown dramatically since our grand opening in April 2000. Through January 2003, we have had more than 1,000 men, women, and children who have been touched by cancer join our special community to learn how to live with cancer, whatever the outcome.

Our program calendar is filled with exciting workshops, informative lectures, and fun-filled social events. We have had an overwhelming response from the community. Guest lecturers and volunteers facilitate our numerous workshops throughout each month. Due to their generosity, Gilda's Club offers a very diverse program.

If you would like to learn more about the Gilda's Club program, contact Laura Mott, Program Director; Tracy Layman or Karen Sarraga, program managers, at (201) 457-1670. ■

Gilda's Club NNJ Receives \$20,000 Donation

The good work of Gilda's Club Northern New Jersey has attracted the attention of The Doll League, which presented the organization with a \$20,000 check at a black-tie event held at Pier Sixty at Chelsea Piers on Sunday, December 1, 2002.



The Doll League, Inc., founded in 1958 by Ethel Sissle, wife of renowned musician/lyricist Nobel Sissle, began through Mrs. Sissle's belief that a group of women working together could make a difference in the lives of underprivileged New York City children.

In the decades since the club's formation, The Doll League has expanded its philanthropy and consistently identifies and fills small and large

pockets of need in the New York metropolitan area. "We are honored that such a prestigious organization has become part of the Gilda's Club family," said Gilda's Club Northern New Jersey Executive Director Betsy Davison.

Gilda's Club member A. Heather Masters, her son, and board member Deborah Aronson attended the elegant evening of dinner and dancing. Ms. Masters spoke to the audience about her own cancer experience and her reason for joining Gilda's Club Northern New Jersey. In her speech, she spoke about the need for social and emotional support while living with cancer. ■

Debbie Aronson, Gilda's Club board trustee, Barbara Marson, Doll League member, A. Heather Masters, Gilda's Club member, and Lesley Crosson, Doll League member.

TO MAKE A DONATION

If you would like to make a donation to support Gilda's Club, please contact

Betsy Davison, executive director at

(201) 457-1670 or

betsyd@gildasclubnnj.com.

Members Take a Break at Spa Day

Rejuvenation and relaxation permeated the atmosphere of Gilda's Club Northern New Jersey on November 10, when 40 members took time out of their hectic schedules to focus on themselves during "Spa Day." Gilda's Club volunteer Marlene Prins organized this special spotlight on relaxation, self-care, and pampering, made possible with the help of many other volunteers and sponsors.

Kicking off the day was a breakfast followed by a presentation chock-full of valuable information by Alexis Fromm of Alexis J's Wiggery in Ridgewood. Then members relaxed by participating in gentle yoga, led by volunteer Laura Bloom, or music with volunteer Mary Comptois.

The peaceful, tranquil atmosphere continued in the community room, with lunch prepared by local restaurant Naturally Good. In addition to delectable food, Spa Day participants enjoyed give-away bags donated by Lifetime Television. Each beautiful tote included a gift certificate for a free massage contributed by Professional Touch Massage Facility, Clifton—what a gift—as well as magazines donated by Self and cosmetics donated by Clinique. Other give-aways were generously provided by Aesthetics, Englewood Cliffs; Academy of Massage Therapy, Englewood; Araya Rebirth, Ridgewood; Eco Galleria, Teaneck; More Than Friends, Paterson; Parisian

Beauty Academy, Hackensack; Salon V'Paj, Englewood; and Trader Joe's, Westwood.

After lunch, Roslyn Rolan, president of the Image & Etiquette Institute, Fort Lee, delivered a fun-filled and valuable workshop on color and makeup. Spa Day concluded with a chanting session with members of the Hermitage in Chestnut Ridge, New York.

It was our most remarkable Spa Day ever. A special thanks to Bobby Chiego, owner of Aesthetics in Englewood Cliffs, his entire staff, and their clientele for their overwhelming generosity and sponsorship of the day. We hope to see you next year! ■

A Member's Message

"As a family member who has lost many people to cancer, including my husband and father, and nearly lost a 24-year-old daughter, I came to Gilda's in desperate need of peace, understanding, and caring. From the moment I walked through that wonderful red door, I was embraced by this loving, caring environment, and the most marvelous, caring people I had ever met. I immediately felt the beginning of a feeling of peace settle around me. Joining Victor's painting class has been a true salvation. When I'm painting, either at Gilda's or at home, I am able to put my problems and stresses aside and give myself a much needed 'mental' vacation. Although her doctors have declared

Tara 'cured,' a true miracle as far as I'm concerned, and she has put it all behind her and is moving ahead with her life, I still need a lot of support and understanding to deal with her illness. The staff, all the volunteers, and the members that I now call friends are always there for me, sharing their love and their wisdom, and their incredible ability to live life in the face of cancer. I am so thankful to have Gilda's Club accessible to me. Bless you all!" ■

Barbara Wintner
member



Members of the John Harms Performance Company

Celebrating the Season

Gilda's Club Northern New Jersey rang in the holiday season with an Appreciation Brunch on Sunday, December 15. More than 200 members, volunteers, donors, board members, families, and friends came to the clubhouse for music, laughter, goodwill, and holiday cheer.

The highlight of the afternoon was a musical performance by the John Harms Performance Company, a group of talented teenagers who perform throughout Bergen County. A quiet hush came over the community room as the teenagers performed holiday songs and patriotic tunes. As what usually happens at Gilda's Club, a feeling of well-being and a sense of community pervaded the atmosphere. And just when we thought we had seen the best Chef Giorgio could offer, he and his wonderful staff created a buffet of tantalizing treats!

Special thanks for the extraordinary generosity of the men, women, and companies who make our yearly holiday party such a wonderful celebration. Gilda's Club Northern New Jersey is also very grateful to LuSheann Caterers and staff for their warmth, laughter, continued support, and incredible presentation and sumptuous food. We also thank A.S.A.P., Linen, Inc., Prestige Party Rentals, George Dalcero, DePiero's Farms, and Goldberg's Famous Bagels for their generosity. The day ended as it began, with people smiling and sharing the day's experiences, the true magic of Gilda's Club. ■