A Winning Night!
By Laura Tartaro-McGowan

DC Candlelighters successfully held its First Annual Casino Night Fundraiser on March 4, 2023, at the Arlington Knights of Columbus. Guests enjoyed Blackjack, Roulette, Poker and Craps and were playing with funny money to seek out 1st, 2nd and 3rd Place. When not at the casino tables, guests were bidding on fabulous silent auction items, enjoying spectacular food, sipping on Firefly Tea, our signature drink of the night, identifying raffle items they were hoping to win, and simply being silly @ the Silly Shotz Photo Booth!

It was a tremendous amount of fun all to raise money to support DMV families who have children fighting cancer. We are especially grateful to our sponsors. Each sponsor received a designated casino table, food, drink, silent auction, or raffle table with their name prominently displayed. (continued from left side)

I want to give a huge SHOUT OUT to the DC Candlelighters Board of Directors, my son, Ian and daughter Alyssa (pictured above), for their time and efforts making this vision a reality, and to my husband, Collin, for making everyone laugh all night….he’s the one with the gold tinsel hat! We had so many fabulous people show up to support this event. We even had someone from the NBA show up and have fun! (continues on page 2).

Save these 2023 Dates! – details, zoom link and registration info will be updated on our website!

Zoom Bingo
September 26
November 28
7 pm - 8 pm

Family Fun Day
Saturday, June 4
Bull Run Regional Park
1 pm - 4 pm

First Annual DCC Walk
Saturday August 19
10:00 am -12:00 pm
Wherever you can walk!

Pampered Chef Fundraiser
August 1-31
On-Line

Fun on the Farm
Saturday, September 16
Afternoon
Cox Farms
One of the coolest things was that we had two long-term childhood cancer survivors there volunteering: Ian McGowan and Ashton Schaffer. THANK YOU both for your dedication to our children and families now in the fight that you know all too well.

This was a huge undertaking, countless hours of work by many, dedication to our mission, and just a great group of people. Because of this event DC Candlelighters will not only be able to continue their mission, but they will also be able to provide additional financial support to our families this year. As the chair of this FABULOUS, FANTASTIC, WONDERFUL STUPENDOUS EVENT I am already starting to plan next years’ Casino Night, so if you didn’t make it this year mark your calendars for March 2, 2024 for our 2nd annual Casino Night! If you are interested in sponsoring opportunities, email me at ltmcgowan@comcast.net.

The 2023-2024 DC Candlelighters Board

*Meg Crossett – Co-President
*Sheri Schaffer – Co-President, Special Events, Marketing and Advertising Chair
*Pat Lawless – Emeritus Board Member
Jennifer Teise - Vice President and Volunteer Coordinator
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Constance Connor – Secretary and Special Events Chair
Laura Tartaro-McGowan - Development/Fundraising Director
Andrea Bilaniuk – Webmaster and Newsletter Editor
Amy Switzer - Hospital and Clinic Liaison
Asia Watson - Branding Manager
Rachel Dacanay Smith - Non-Profit Organization and Community Liaison
Sharon Truzzi - Database Manager

* denotes Founding Member
**Zoom Bingo**

Zoom Bingo continues to be a hit with our families! Kids and parents alike enjoy the ease of logging in and having fun from the comfort of their homes/hospital! The Bingo Bunch loves to connect with each other and welcome new players. Consider joining us in November! Prizes will be mailed to the victors!

**Rachel’s Royal Tea Party**

A fun time was had by all our princes and princesses at our annual Rachel’s Royal Tea Party on April 22. Tea and treats were served while our littlest guests dressed up in their tea party and prince and princess finest to model for everyone. Crafts were enjoyed by the kiddos and moms and dads left with a beautiful swag bag full of beauty and skin care goodies graciously donated by Moment of Grace and Jitka Jacobs. Jitka also donated the fabulous grand prize raffle basket. This annual event is in memory of Rachel Crossett, who lost her battle to cancer more than 2 decades ago at the age of 6. Rachel was a girly girl who loved the color red, roses, and tea parties. The DC Candlelighters is privileged to honor her memory in this way every year.

**White House Easter Egg Roll**

The DC Candlelighters had the opportunity to send several families to the White House Easter Egg Roll on Monday, April 10. In addition to the time-honored traditions of rolling and hunting eggs, this year’s White House Easter “EGGucation” Roll featured a School House Activity Area, full of fun educational activities for families. The Talent Show stage on the South Lawn featured exciting educational acts and presentations including a rousing performance by the Broadway company of The Lion King. Families came together for some special story time with children’s book authors and special guests, including First Lady Jill Biden reading “Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See?” while her grandson, Beau Biden held the book for her. The event also included special snacks and treats, music by The United States Air Force Band, Army Band and Navy Band, and a field trip to the farm where children learned about how farmers help feed our families.
Meet our Light of the Month Super Kids

Evelyn Lander

Evelyn, a delightful six-year-old from Arlington, was our March LOTM Super Kid! She’s in the first grade and loves to ice skate and play soccer. She likes to think about school and is happiest when she is with her family. Evelyn is a Big Sister to Ruth, and the pair has fun doing things together. Evelyn reports, “What I like about the DC Candlelighters is they provide everything for you!” We are thrilled to spotlight this lively, joyful, loving little girl as our very first LOTM child! Congratulations!

Grant Hobson

It’s easy to see why Grant was our May LOTM Super Kid! Grant, a six-year-old kindergartner from Vienna, is a determined, happy little guy who never gives up! Diagnosed with acute lymphoblastic leukemia, young Grant finished treatment in November 2021. He enjoys reading, soccer and swimming. Grant is also learning to code robots because he loves robots! Grant loves to be the center of attention but happily shares the spotlight with his Little Brother Calvin. Grant is a fan of DC Candlelighters because, “they always have fun surprises coming up!” He’s always up for an adventure and we love that about Grant!

If your child would like to be featured as a LOTM, please see our website for eligibility

Our funny, smart June LOTM Super Kid is Elizabeth! She’s a determined five-year-old from Leesburg, who is finishing up pre-K at Karter Schools of Cascades. Elizabeth is quite the nature girl! She loves to play soccer, collect flowers, collect rocks and be outdoors. She never gives up and doesn’t let her 2022 diagnosis of acute lymphoblastic leukemia stop her. Elizabeth is happiest attending school, seeing her friends, dancing and singing. Our featured June warrior says what she likes about DC Candlelighters is all the events she gets to attend because it makes her very happy. You make us happy too, sweet Elizabeth!
Andriko was diagnosed with stage three embryonal rhabdomyosarcoma in the spring of 2018, when he was a thirteen-year-old eighth grader at St. Mark Catholic School in Oakton, Virginia. For two and a half years, he fought tirelessly, undergoing extensive chemotherapy, radiation, surgeries and other procedures. Sadly, days before his sixteenth birthday, Andriko’s body betrayed him.

During his brief, spirited life, Andriko was engaged in many activities and held many interests. His primary language was Ukrainian, and he did not learn to speak English until he began kindergarten, at age five. At the same time, he began his study of violin, which was his primary passion. Andriko played for various regional youth orchestras, performed at weddings, nursing homes and private recitals. He was also self-taught in piano, guitar, mandolin, and briefly played the saxophone. Andriko also studied Spanish, beginning at age nine.

Andriko was a strong athlete, having participated and competed in various sports. Throughout his life, he played soccer, basketball and fenced. However, it was his love of the violin that kept pulling him closer. Andriko was also a very active member of Plast, Ukrainian Scouting Organization. He held leadership positions in the local chapter and attended many Plast summer camps in Upstate New York. Andriko was a member of the Class of 2022 at Bishop O’Connell High School in Arlington, Virginia, attending as a Knights Honor Scholar. He participated in a few school clubs, notably the Strings Ensemble and Quiz Bowl Team, but his treatment schedule would not allow for more activities. The Bilaniuk Family is proud to offer The Andriko Bilaniuk ’22 Memorial Endowed Scholarship at his high school. In addition, every Saturday beginning at age three, Andriko attended the Taras Shevchenko School of Ukrainian Studies of Greater Washington DC. He graduated in May 2020, two months before he entered Heaven.

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Andriko was under the excellent care of the Pediatric Specialists of Virginia, (Center for Cancer and Blood Disorders), Virginia Cancer Specialists, Inova Children’s Hospital, Inova Schar Cancer Institute, Children’s National Hospital, Albany (NY) Medical Center, and Capital Caring Hospice. While his battle was arduous, often precluding him from attending school, seeing friends, playing sports, performing on his violin and pursuing his intellectual curiosities (Andriko was an avid reader and prolific writer), this young man soldiered on. Andriko was deeply spiritual, and never claimed to be suffering. He often wondered why people prayed for him, when “others need the prayers more”. Andriko was laid to eternal rest on his sixteenth birthday, in Upstate New York. He leaves behind in great sorrow his younger brother Pete, countless cousins, and his grieving parents, one of whom dedicates her time to serve of the Board of DC Candlelighters Childhood Cancer Foundation, in his memory. (black and white violin photo by Matt Mendelsohn Photography)