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Treating families, not cancer

Atlanta Business Chronicle - by [Maria Saporta](#) Contributing Writer

Atlanta based non-profit Foundation is touching lives across the country in a very impressive, meaningful manner with an equally impressive business model.



Byron E. Small

Adding value to patient care: Jon Albert, center, shown here with daughter Jamie, left, and son Jake, right, started the Jack & Jill Late Stage Cancer Foundation.

In the end, it all comes down to memories.

On Nov. 15, 2006, Jill Albert passed away from cancer entrusting her husband, Jon Albert, and their two young children to carry on her legacy of family and fond memories.

That's how the **Jack & Jill Late Stage Cancer Foundation** was formed. The national foundation based in Atlanta provides families with a terminally ill parent a special gift of lasting memories.

The foundation will organize "Wow moments" for the parents and children to enjoy — be it a trip to Hilton Head or New York City or **Disney World** — before it's too late.

"She always wanted us to remember her," Jake Albert, who is about to turn 16, said of his mother. "It gives you things to remember for years and years."

"It's a pretty special legacy for my mom," said Jamie Albert, Jake's younger sister, who just turned 14. "It's comforting to know that we are making these people's lives a lot happier for a few days while they can still be together."

The foundation has provided special moments to nearly 200 families since it was actively launched in 2007. Testimonial after testimonial demonstrates how the

foundation has been able to keep a parent's presence alive even after they've passed on.

"We treat families, not cancer," Albert said. "In most of our families, the parent is gone three, four, five months later. We represent the memory component."

Those memories are captured through a partnership with **Eastman Kodak Co.**, which provides each family with a photo album of their experience.

And Kodak is only one of many corporate friends the Jack & Jill Late Stage Cancer Foundation has cultivated in the past two years.

The Coca-Cola Co., AirTran Airways Inc., Southwest Airlines, the National Basketball Association, Major League Baseball, the National Football League, Six Flags, Anheuser-Busch, Marriott, Ritz-Carlton, Starwood Resorts & Hotels, Hyatt, Exclusive Resorts, the Grammy Awards, the Country Music Association, NASCAR, ESPN, Disney, Universal, DreamWorks, SeaWorld, Northern Trust, Royal Caribbean Cruise Lines, Carnival Cruise Lines, Sony, Warner Bros., Creative Artists and Aflac Inc. are just some of the entities that have signed on to give families a lasting happy memory.

The friends of the foundation are among Atlanta's Who's Who, including Billy Payne of Olympics fame and the head of Augusta National Golf Course; Rich McKay of the **Atlanta Falcons**; Dennis Kelly of **Zoo Atlanta**; Derek Schiller of the **Atlanta Braves**; Wendy Clark of The Coca-Cola Co. and Bill Todd of the **Georgia Cancer Coalition**.

"It's very, very emotional," said Joel Katz of Greenberg Traurig LLP, one of the leading entertainment lawyers in the country, who has helped open doors for Albert. "It's doing something very good for people you don't know who are going through a difficult time in their lives."

Tad Hutcheson, AirTran Airways' vice president of marketing and sales, has been on the foundation's board since its inception.

"Jack and Jill affects so many kids who have a parent with cancer, or who have lost a parent to cancer, and we want to help offer the families of these kids a bright spot — perhaps a trip to Orlando to visit Disney World," Hutcheson said. "There is nothing more important than creating lasting memories with your family and AirTran Airways is proud to do a little part in making these kids lives a bit brighter by offering them a trip."

Another friend of the foundation is Joel Babbit, a former advertising executive who is now running the Mother Nature Network. He met Jon and Jill Albert after she was diagnosed with cancer.

“When she did pass away and Jon started the foundation, it was more meaningful to me having seen firsthand what he had gone through,” Babbit said. “Not only did he not wallow in self-pity, but he took very positive steps based on what had occurred.”

The foundation only works with families who have been recommended by physicians and oncologists. They belong to a national coalition of cancer hospitals and centers, including **Emory University’s Winship Cancer Institute, Grady Memorial Hospital, Georgia Cancer Specialists, Atlanta Cancer Care, Northside Hospital and Piedmont Hospital.**

Nationally, the foundation works with City of Hope, **Cedars-Sinai Medical Center, University of California Los Angeles, Memorial Sloane-Kettering Cancer Center** and **MD Anderson Cancer Center**, among others.

“The oncology network legitimizes everything,” said Albert, who adds that doctors appreciate being able to recommend their patients to participate in one of the foundation’s offerings. “We add value to their patient care.”

Although there have been great advances in cancer research, Albert said the disease still will claim the lives of thousands of mothers and fathers in their 20s, 30s and 40s, who will be leaving children without a parent.

Because of the number of families going through such a loss, Albert said the foundation could really explode or could continue serving one family at a time. Much will depend on how much support the foundation can attract to fulfill its mission of giving families a brief respite of happiness at a time of deep sadness.

When Jake and Jamie Albert remember their mother, they remember her smile and her closeness. “What I enjoyed most was just talking to her,” Jake said.

Jamie remembers going to her for advice. “She just always knew how to cheer me up,” Jamie said.

And then there was that trip to Hilton Head about four months before she died. There are pictures of the family on the beach, including some of them parasailing.

“One of Jill’s biggest fears; she was so fearful that the kids would forget her,” Jon Albert said. “One of the primary purposes of the foundation is to give these families something to remember. Memories become our greatest inheritance.”

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For information on the Jack & Jill Late Stage Cancer Foundation, visit www.jajf.org