

Families unite to battle cancer, raise research funds

By LINDSAY ACKERMAN

When Ashleigh Kieliszewski started having problems walking just before her third birthday, her parents suspected a sprained foot or muscle strain.

But then a large lump appeared underneath the tot's rib cage, and after numerous trips to the doctor, the diagnosis was confirmed - cancer.

Last week, eight months after doctors surgically removed a 4.5-pound tumor from the Gaines Township youngster, Ash-

leigh was in strong enough condition to attend a fundraiser aimed at generating more public awareness about the particular type of cancer she and several other area girls suffer from.

The Bounce party raised nearly \$3,000 for the Children's Neuroblastoma Cancer Foundation, a national organization aimed at finding a cure for the solid tumor cancer that accounts for 14 percent of all cancers in children younger than age 5.

The cancer most often begins near the adrenal

gland and the average age at diagnosis is 2 years old.

At last week's party, Ashleigh was joined by fellow cancer survivor Molly Cavera, 4, of East Grand Rapids, whose parents Michelle and Dan Cavera organized the event.

Two other youngsters, Katelyn Reynolds, 4, of Kentwood, and Sarah Kaper, 5, of Hudsonville, who are also battling neuroblastoma, were unable to attend the fundraiser held in their honor.

"All the girls were diagnosed between March and



Gaines Township youngster Ashleigh Kieliszewski pals around with best friend Caleb Lane at a recent fundraiser.

July last year, and are all about the same age, and our families got to know each

other during their treatment at DeVos Children's Hospital. Please see FUNDRAISER, page 2

FUNDRAISER

Continued from page 1

tal," said Michelle Cavera.

Cavera said the families are all hopeful their daughters will win the battle against cancer, and the girls are maintaining high spirits despite the grueling treatment for neuroblastoma, which includes chemotherapy, radiation, and stem cell transplants.

Molly, Ashleigh, and Katelyn currently show no sign of disease, and Sarah is currently undergoing stem cell transplant.

"We've found so much strength through supporting each other," said Cavera. "Many times our kids' treatment overlapped in the hospital and it was so encouraging to find a friendly face,

knowing that you are going through the same thing together."

Cavera said she hopes the fundraiser will begin to raise awareness in the community about the need for more research into cures for neuroblastoma.

"This is a cancer that is less well known, and because of that it is not as well funded," she said. "Neuroblastoma is lagging behind other children's cancers as far as success rates."

Donations for the Children's Neuroblastoma Cancer Foundation can be sent to P.O. Box 6635, Bloomington, IL, 60108. For more information about neuroblastoma cancer, visit the foundation's Web site at www.ncfchildcancer.org.