

# FORTUNE 52

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OCTOBER 18, 2010 PHOTOS BY DAVID WEXLER

More than 500 Long Island business professionals came together at Tilles Center for the Performing Arts on Monday, October 18th to honor and acknowledge the most recent group of extraordinary Long Island women who are highlighted each week in Beverly Fortune's column, Fortune 52.

As the Fortune 52 events continue to grow, we would like to thank all who attended for helping support our local businesses and non profit communities.

## TillesCenter

for the Performing Arts  
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### OCTOBER 2010 HONOREES

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# Fortune 52

BY BEVERLY FORTUNE

## LONG ISLAND WOMEN MAKING A DIFFERENCE

PRESENTED BY **CACTUS SALON & Day Spa**

## Love Thy Neighbor



**CHRISTINE FITZGERALD**  
FOUNDING BOARD  
MEMBER  
SMITHTOWN CHILDREN'S  
FOUNDATION

A crisis can turn a family's life upside down in a matter of minutes. The impact can be devastating, but when a community gets involved, their response can often be inspiring and life-changing.

Kaylee Rivers was in kindergarten in 2008 when she was diagnosed with Stage 4 Neuroblastoma, a severe form of cancer that affects mostly infants and children. News of the family's crisis quickly spread through their Nesconset neighborhood.

Christine and Tom Fitzgerald lived on the same block as the Rivers, so when they heard about Kaylee's condition, they

immediately wanted to help her family. Christine and Tom, who own Colana Sports Group, Inc., began planning a benefit golf outing.

At the same time Christine was organizing the golf outing, she learned that another local woman, Christina Alcure, was also arranging a dinner dance to help the Rivers family.

Christine believed that if they pooled their resources, they would have a much bigger impact in helping the family. So Christine, Christina and another local mother, Kristy Jaeger, all with children in the Smithtown school district, came together to form the non-profit Smithtown Children's Foundation (SCF). Its mission is to provide financial and emotional support to children and families within Smithtown by bringing family, friends, neighbors and local businesses

together to act as one during times of crisis.

Since its inception, SCF has turned strangers into friends, local businesses into community advocates, and children into volunteers. Simple acts of kindness and generosity from the public has had a profound effect in helping these families get their lives back in order. "It brought the community together," Christine says proudly.

The 15 schools in the Smithtown district, which includes Smithtown, Nesconset and St. James, have 11,000 children enrolled. With that many people, Christine believes there is always going to be somebody who can use help.

"We are building a war chest," Christine says about their ongoing fundraising efforts. "We are advocates for families in need. There is a form online that you can nominate a family for assistance. That's my green light to call the family," she explains.

Christine recounted many stories about people that have received assistance from SCF including a family whose home was destroyed by a fire. "The mother needed an expensive high chair for her special needs child," Christine recalls. "We paid for the high chair. It was one less thing for the poor woman to worry about." In another instance, SCF helped a family after a man hanging Christmas lights fell off his ladder and became paralyzed. "We paid some of their bills to help them breathe easier," she says. Recently Christine learned that a young man suffering from a severe case of Tourette's Syndrome was undergoing radical surgery, which could cost about \$200,000. "It's such a small world. I found out they were from Smithtown," she says, so she contacted them and told the relieved family that SCF would commit some of their resources to help pay a portion of his medical expenses. Christine has many more stories of how the SCF has helped families dealing with bone marrow transplants, traumatic brain injuries, and other catastrophes that are unexpected and financially devastating.

Christine routinely visits the Smithtown school PTA's to educate them about the SCF and how they can help local families. "Sometimes it takes some explaining to describe exactly what we do," she says, adding that the group does not rely on PTA resources for its funding.

She says that they would like a SCF representative in every school to advocate for families who might need help. On a smaller scale, she says, "We ask the PTA to select a

needy family and then we donate gift cards to them."

The SCF annually holds what Christine calls signature events that include a holiday breakfast hosted at Maureen's Kitchen, a golf outing and a Kisses for Kaylee community dinner dance at the Watermill Inn in honor of Kaylee, who has since passed away. It's not just the adults who are involved in the SCF. Christine's teenage daughter, Alana, and her friend came up with the idea of a teen Karaoke Day that they got local businesses to sponsor and has become the newest SCF signature event.

Even the elementary school-aged children can volunteer for some tasks and they get to participate in the events as well. "At the Watermill [dinner dance], Christine says, "We have a separate room for the kid's that holds a slumber party. The Girl Scouts run the room and the kids get their own DJ," she adds. "It feels like a big family."

Everyone benefits from the SCF experience. Volunteers enjoy the satisfaction that comes with helping their neighbors. Local businesses have engrained themselves in the community and include medical professionals, business owners, entrepreneurs and employees that donate their time, money, products and services enabling the SCF to help these families cope with mounting bills in their time of crisis. People are also encouraged to make a one-time donation as a remembrance to a loved one as yet another way to be involved in the SCF. Everyone can contribute in some way.

"My fear was we were going to raise money and there would be no one to help. Unfortunately that has not been the case," Christine says and added,

"Our hope was that this concept takes off, and someone is going to spearhead this so that other communities will come together like we did."

If Christine has her way, ready-made community supported networks like the SCF will form across Long Island with neighbors helping neighbors and people coming together to assist those who need it most. **●**

For more information go to [www.SmithtownChildrensFoundation.com](http://www.SmithtownChildrensFoundation.com) or call Christine at 631-584-9511 or email [fitzyBBCF@optonline.net](mailto:fitzyBBCF@optonline.net)

If you know a super woman who deserves good Fortune—and a profile—e-mail your nominations to Beverly at [bfortune@longislandpress.com](mailto:bfortune@longislandpress.com).

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