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Local News

Scholarship established in memory of teacher

BY: [ARLENE FINE](#) Senior Staff Reporter

Last May when Tricia Luxenburg, 32, died after a yearlong battle with breast cancer, her husband Mitchell refused to give in to despair.

"It would not be fitting to my wife's memory if I did not celebrate life the way she did," he says. "She was always talking about the glory of life and her four little angels, even until the very end."

To honor his wife's outstanding career as a teacher and her love of children, the attorney has established The Tricia Luxenburg Memorial Scholarship for future teachers. A fundraising event "In the name of ..." will be held at Landerhaven on May 11.

The mother of Max, 5; Miranda, 4; Ethan, 2; and Lauren, 11 months, Luxenburg was diagnosed with cancer in March 2005 while five months pregnant with the couple's fourth child.

Although she was raised Catholic, when the couple married in 2000, they had a Jewish wedding officiated by Rabbi Susan Stone. Tricia agreed the children would be brought up with one religion and each of the four Luxenburg children was converted to Judaism at birth. Before she became ill, Tricia had intended to convert as well.

"Months before we lost her, Tricia took a bad turn and was praying for guidance," recalls her husband. "Just then, Rabbi Ed Sukol of Congregation Bethaynu called to offer spiritual assistance. Tricia said, 'I want to meet



Mitchell and Tricia Luxenburg in 2005 with their children, from left, Miranda, Ethan, Lauren and Max.

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with him; I am ready to convert to Judaism. It is important that I share the same religion with my children.”

Shortly after her decision to convert, Tricia was rushed to The Cleveland Clinic. Rabbi Sukol came to her bedside and converted her in the hospital room.

“There is no denying that Tricia decided to convert at that moment in the face of death,” says Luxenburg. “But Rabbi Sukol said she had led a Jewish life as a mother and wife, so there was no reason not to convert her. He comforted us with these words, ‘We don’t convert people so they can die Jewish; we convert them so they can live Jewish.’”

In honor of her spirit, warmth and soul, Sukol gave Tricia the Hebrew name of Chai-a (life).

Throughout her illness, Tricia never played the victim card, says her husband. “She was a fighter and fought the good fight until the end. But when she knew things were going badly, she told me, ‘When the time comes, I would like you to establish a scholarship for teachers.’”

Tricia began her teaching career with the Lakewood schools and joined the Cleveland Heights-University Heights (CH-UH) school system in 2003. Professionally she was described by Tom Schmida, president of the CH-UH Teachers Union, as “a superb teacher: creative, vibrant, fully vested in her work, and totally committed to the children in her charge.”

Although he has spent the bulk of his time this year caring for his four young children, a time he calls “a long emotional journey,” Luxenburg kept his wife’s wishes close to his heart. With the involvement and support of family and friends, Luxenburg created The Tricia Luxenburg Memorial Scholarship.

“Funds from this scholarship are earmarked for college scholarships for students studying to become teachers,” he says. “I’m confident the scholarship will allow Tricia to live vicariously through future teachers who will carry on her love of teaching. Judaism tells us to celebrate life, and that is what we intend to do with this scholarship.”

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“In the name of....” an evening to benefit The Tricia Luxenburg Memorial Scholarship is May 11 at 6:30 at Landerhaven. Monica Robbins is honorary chair. For information, go to triciasfund.com.

Komen grants over \$1 million

This year marks the first time Susan G. Komen for the Cure Northeast Ohio has given more than \$1 million dollars in grants to support breast cancer education, screening and treatment programs that reach diverse, underserved populations across its 15-county service area.

The grants are made possible by fundraising activities throughout the year, most notably the 13th Annual Komen Northeast Ohio Race for the Cure®, which raised more than \$1.7 million. Grantees in Cuyahoga County include The MetroHealth System’s BREAST program (BRinging Education, Advocacy and Support Together); Northeast Ohio Neighborhood Health Services’ The Mammogram Connection; Cuyahoga County Board of Health’s Breast and Cervical Cancer Project; Ireland Cancer Center’s Project T.E.M.P.L.E. breast health education intervention for Cleveland’s minority communities; The Free Medical Clinic of Greater Cleveland’s breast health awareness and education program; The Gathering Place’s programs for minority women; JD Breast Cancer Foundation’s Project Lifeline; Lesbian Cancer Survivors Support Group; North Coast Health Ministry; and South Pointe Hospital’s BC Check program.

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