



## Mary Grace Memorial Foundation Helps Medina and Stark County Residents Struggling With Cancer

By Jennifer Webb

Dee Samples has always believed in hard work. Over the years, she and her husband have worked multiple jobs to make ends meet.

But when she was diagnosed in May 2009 with breast cancer and her husband suffered a heart attack soon after, they learned it would take more than hard work to help them pay their bills.

“Financially, it became a very scary reality,” recalled Samples, a lifelong resident of Lafayette Township. “I did not know how we would be able to make our payments. We were like, what are we going to do?”

To her relief, a social worker at the Cleveland Clinic told them about the Mary Grace Memorial Foundation, which was formed in 2005 to help residents of Medina or Stark counties facing financial difficulties as they journeyed through their cancer treatments. Founded by Mike Grace, whose wife Mary died of breast cancer in 2005, the foundation has distributed \$175,000 to families coping with cancer who need financial assistance.

A short time after Samples completed the foundation’s application for assistance; she received money in time to make a critical house payment.

“We were still struggling with my diagnosis, then the bills became a major issue. I wasn’t able to work the hours that I wanted to,” said Samples, who, by day, managed a practice of

family physicians and taught medical administration and coding four nights a week.

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*“Then the foundation said they would make the house payment for us. What a load lifted. It was like our prayers had been answered. I still think about it and I get teary-eyed. It meant so much to my husband and me both, because it really took a lot of stress off both of us.”*

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Samples said the grant covered one house payment – which was enough to help the couple in their time of need. “I cannot thank the Mary Grace Foundation enough for that moment of relief they gave us, and that stress-free environment in which I was able to continue my treatments, because we really feared losing our home,” she said. “It’s really amazing what one organization can do to help someone.”

Grace established the foundation soon after his wife’s death out of a desire to memorialize her and continue her commitment to serving the community. Mary, who was raised in Massillon, was a stay-at-home mother in Medina raising her three children and volunteering at their school when she was diagnosed and journeying through her treatments.

Since 2005, the foundation has helped more than 260 families cope a little better with the

numerous day-to-day needs that arise as they maneuver through the many doctor visits, treatments and hospital stays. Much of that money is raised through the annual Race with Grace, a 5K race and fun walk that attracts more than 1,000 runners and walkers.

This year's race will be held at Medina Hospital, a Cleveland Clinic hospital, 1000 E. Washington St., Medina. Runners may register at [active.com](http://active.com) or [ohiochallengeseries.com](http://ohiochallengeseries.com).

Like Mary Grace, Michelle Fry was a 37-year-old mother with three small children when she was diagnosed last November with breast cancer.

Her immediate thought was of her children, then ages 10, 8 and 1, and her husband, whose job with the City of Medina had brought them north from Ashland just five years earlier.

It wasn't long before she realized the full impact of her diagnosis, and how her chemotherapy treatments would make it difficult for her to continue her work as a medical coder. As a part-time employee, Fry did not have disability or other health benefits. That meant it would be difficult to pay the bills.

"You don't realize, until you go through it, the cost of everything," Fry said. "The cost of a wig is \$500-plus. And you say, 'I don't want to pay for a wig!' But you have to; it's part of the process."

It wasn't easy to work up the courage to ask for help, Fry said. But after completing a three-page application and essay, she said the foundation came through quickly. "They said, 'we're here for you, what do you need?'" she recalled.

While a number of foundations exist to provide information and emotional support for families dealing with cancer, Fry said, she was relieved to find such tangible help from the Mary Grace Memorial Foundation. She was especially surprised that help was available for middle-

income families like hers. "We both had jobs, we had kids; I didn't think there were foundations to help people who were just trying to catch up," Fry said.

The foundation will help with utility bills, mortgage or rent payments – the things that become less important when you're fighting for your life, but which still must be paid to protect your family. Mike Grace said he knows first-hand how families feel overwhelmed by the many needs they confront while they are coping with cancer, and he wanted to try to alleviate some of that stress – as Mary would have wanted.

"It just took that burden away," Fry said of the grant she received. "When you're diagnosed, there are so many things being thrown at you – appointments, money this, money that. It was a huge help. I can't tell you how much that helped. It took a lot off of us that we didn't have to worry about."

Fry said she intends to participate in this year's race in an effort to return the kindness she was shown. "It is a great local resource that we have here," said Fry, who continues to receive treatments every three weeks for her cancer. "Let them be there for you."

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## About the Mary Grace Memorial Foundation

**The Mary Grace Memorial Foundation was founded in 2005** and is a 501(c)(3) organization. Its mission: to help families affected by cancer with the basic necessities of life, so that they can concentrate on battling the disease.

**Web site:** [www.racewithgrace.com](http://www.racewithgrace.com)