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May 19, 2007

## Fundraiser to honor girl's big heart

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Staff writer

A Henrietta girl whose struggle with cancer touched thousands throughout the world is being honored with a foundation in her memory.

The foundation, called Alyssa's Angels, will have its first fundraiser Sunday and proceeds will help children in crisis.

Alyssa Bruno drew international attention when one of her teachers started an e-mail chain asking for cards and pennies for Alyssa's 6th birthday. In the weeks that followed, more than 60,000 cards came, along with packages of toys and flowers and balloons. She died in August — just a few weeks after her birthday — and her parents recently announced the formation of Alyssa's Angels.

"We wanted to remember Alyssa," said Chris Bruno, her father. "And we wanted to help the community because the community had been so helpful to us."

When Alyssa was diagnosed with a rare form of childhood cancer called diffuse pontine glioma, members of the Federation of Social Workers donated more than seven months of vacation time to Alyssa's mom and sponsored fundraisers for the family.

"We were astounded by all the people who decided to donate days," said John Vasko, president of the Federation of Social Workers and a board member for Alyssa's Angels. "But you sit and think about your own children and how you would feel."

Now, Vasko hopes people will be generous and help other children.

One of the first projects the foundation hopes to address is visitation rooms.

When children are separated from their parents and in the custody of an agency like the Department of Human Services, often the court requires that the family meet for visits, Vasko said, "and those visitation rooms are pretty neglected in terms of toys and games."

Plus, the rooms could stand to be brightened up, said Bruno, adding that the foundation also plans to buy some software for the kids at the Monroe County Children's Center, where Alyssa's mother works.

"Alyssa would see these kids and ask, 'Why aren't they home with their mommies and daddies?'" Bruno said. "Even at 4 and 5, she never wanted to see any of the kids not be with their families."

The foundation will eventually reach out to children with medical, behavioral or emotional needs, Bruno said.

"More than anything, we want the foundation to be reflective of Alyssa's character."

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### If you go

**What:** Pasta dinner to raise money for Alyssa's Angels, a charitable organization that plans to help children in crisis.

**When:** Noon to 4 p.m. Sunday.

**Where:** La Trattoria D'Abruzzo, 1770 E. Ridge Road, Irondequoit. The restaurant is donating all of the food and staff time, so all the money raised will go to the foundation.

**Cost:** \$10 for adults and \$5 for children 12 and younger. Tickets can be purchased in advance at the restaurant or the day of the event.

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