

# Young cancer patients and their families treated to weekend in Southwest Missouri

By ELISE T. BISHOP  
Submitted to The Examiner

Four sick children and their families were treated to Ozarks vacations this month, courtesy of a local charity whose mission is to help kids with cancer have fun.

Founded by two-time cancer survivor and disabled retired Army major Don Bishop, the University of Table Rock Lake Foundation will have sponsored over 20 families by the end of the year.

"This summer has been our best yet," Bishop said. "The word about what we do is finally getting out."

The Carpenter family from Independence, Mo., heard about the organization from their social worker at Kansas City's Children's Mercy Hospital. Aydan Carpenter, 5, has been battling Ewing's sarcoma since April 2009.

Aydan's dad, Ty, said that the trip went better than he expected. "Aydan had a blast. He loved it, loved it!"

His mom, Geneva, agreed. "We were at Silver Dollar City for five hours," she said. "We thought he'd last maybe an hour."

"He rode rides we never thought he would go on," Ty said. "He enjoyed everything we did."

And they did a lot, everything from riding the Mighty Galleon at SDC to taking in the Presleys' show, driving go-carts, and eating dinner at Mazzio's in Branson.

Aydan's three siblings - 14-year-old Alex, 13-year-old Mariah, and 7-year-old Madison - were so busy that they had no time to go on the Internet the entire weekend.

Like Aydan, 6-year-old Logan Dills of Aurora, Mo., was also diagnosed in 2009 - acute lymphoblastic leukemia. He and his family found out about UTRLF from their visits to the St. John's Jane Pitt Pediatric Cancer Center in Springfield, Mo.

**"Financially, with medical expenses and one income, we couldn't afford a vacation."**

**Elizabeth Gonzalez**  
12-year-old son, Gunner, is currently in remission

Three weeks per month, Logan is treated there. The fourth week he travels to St. Jude's in Memphis, Tenn., where he receives spinal chemotherapy.

According to Logan's parents, Rodney and Deb, it's difficult for their family of six to get away. Rodney said, "It's pretty expensive for us to do anything as family. I have wanted to take my four kids to the Dixie Stampede for a long time but couldn't afford it."

But that's all changed now. The entire family got to see the show Friday night. Logan especially enjoyed seeing the horses.

Dixie Stampede was also the favorite of 12-year-old history lover Gunner Gonzalez, from Neosho, Mo. Gunner is another acute lymphoblastic leukemia patient who heard about the Foundation from his social worker at Kansas City's Children's Mercy Hospital.

Although Gunner is currently in remission, he has faced a lot of setbacks. But he was all smiles the morning of his interview, eager to talk about the new shoes he bought on his shopping trip to Tanger Mall, his day at Silver Dollar City, and the hot tub at the Still Waters Resort, where all four families stayed.

According to Gunner's mom, Elizabeth, "Financially, with medical expenses and one income, we couldn't afford a vacation."

Gunner himself said that his entire attitude "skyrocketed" when he found out that UTRLF was providing a three-night/four-day getaway for him, his mom, and his 2-year-old sister, Leilee. "It gave him something to look



Submitted photos



(Top) Logan Dills, 6, of Aurora, Mo., splashes into the pool. (Left) Devin Southard, 5, of Nixa, Mo., eats pizza at Mazzio's with his grandfather and little brother Zachary. (Above) Aydan Carpenter, 5, of Independence, Mo., rides a swing ride at Silver Dollar City in Branson with mother Geneva. The families visited Southwest Missouri as part of the University of Table Rock Lake Foundation, which provides short getaways for sick kids and their families.

forward to," Elizabeth said.

Gunner's only regret was that his father couldn't come along. He had to stay behind to work.

Devin Southard, 5, of Nixa, Mo., is another acute lymphoblastic leukemia patient who receives treatment at St. John's and St. Jude's. Devin has been fighting the disease since he was 2. According to his mom, Stephanie, he has one year left of treatment.

As a single mother, Stephanie said that it's hard to take Devin and his little brother, Zachary, out of their 800-square-foot apartment. They have to stay inside most of the time.

"This trip was an opportunity to let them get outside, enjoy the sun, and just be boys," she said. Stephanie's

father was able to come along to help out.

In addition to paddle boating and kayaking on Table Rock Lake and swimming in the Still Waters oasis pool, the family went to Silver Dol-

lar City and Dixie Stampede, where Devin liked eating corn on the cob.

Devin summed up his trip as only a 5-year-old can: "Fun!"

To that, Bishop replied,

"Mission accomplished!"

To view photos of UTRLF families having fun, click on the Newsletter link at the University of Table Rock Lake Foundation website at [www.uoftrl.com](http://www.uoftrl.com).



Gunner Gonzalez, 12, of Neosho, Mo., and sister, Leilee, 2, enjoyed a weekend in Branson.

## Constitution Week Proclamation issued to Blue Springs Daughters of the American Revolution



Submitted photo

State representative Gary Dusenberge presents Paula Clyma, Regent of the Blue Springs Daughters of the American Revolution, with a Proclamation from the Missouri House of Representatives promoting Constitution Week, which ended yesterday.

## Family meals beneficial to kids

Children who eat meals with their parents less likely to smoke, drink or use drugs

By LYNDA JOHNSON  
MU Extension

UNIVERSITY OF MISSOURI  
Extension

Following more than 10 years of research, The National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University consistently found that kids who eat dinner with their families are less likely to smoke, drink or use drugs.

In 2001, CASA launched the annual Family Day - A Day to Eat Dinner with Your Children™ to remind parents that frequent family dinners make a difference. Family Day (September 27, 2010) focuses attention on the importance of eating and talking together at mealtime. According to a University of Missouri Extension Nutrition and Health Education Specialist, family meals are not only a simple, effective tool to help prevent substance abuse in kids, many studies show that family meals are good for children's nutrition as well.

"Many child experts indicate that regular family meals are one of the best ways to help children and

teens be fit, healthy, and ready to succeed," says Lynda Johnson, M.S., R.D. with University of Missouri Extension. Young people who spend more time eating and talking with their families are more likely to do well in school, more likely to have a healthy weight and get the nutrition they need. They are also less likely to use drugs, alcohol, and tobacco, and less likely to develop eating disorders.

Family mealtime helps foster a sense of connectedness for children and provides an opportunity to focus on family communication. Positive conversations at mealtime strengthen family relationships, share family values and help parents understand the challenges that children face today.

Johnson promotes family meals as both an opportunity for family interactions, but also the ideal setting to teach children the benefits of

healthful eating. "Use mealtime for nutrition show-and-tell," she suggests. "Show kids how to eat slowly and enjoy their food, while also talking about how eating healthy foods helps you grow strong and have the energy needed to play hard."

Family Day - A Day to Eat Dinner with Your Children™ encourages family meals "even if you aren't a great cook." The focus should be on the time interacting together, not on creating an elaborate meal.

The meal can be as simple as ordering a pizza or picking up a rotisserie chicken, cooking a vegetable, and preparing a salad - the "semi-homemade" approach.

Johnson agrees, and emphasizes that "planning" is really the key to family meals that taste great and take little preparation time during busy work weeks.

A great tool for planning delicious nutrient-rich family meals can be found at USDA's My Pyramid ([www.mypyramid.gov/](http://www.mypyramid.gov/)), where you will find a 7-day My Pyramid menu plan.

Johnson indicates that planning meals together offers many of the same benefits as eating together. Busy families can start simple at first and schedule one or two

meals a week together. Once a routine is established, the family can gradually increase the number of meals to as many as possible.

Involve children in making food decisions, especially when it comes to vegetables, such as giving them a choice, do you want broccoli or carrots for dinner? Assign each family member a task like making the salad, setting the table, preparing the beverages, or slicing fruit for dessert. Other sources for meal planning include the Meals Matter website from California Dairy Council ([www.mealsmatter.org/](http://www.mealsmatter.org/)) where you can find options in several categories including "Quick to Prepare" (under 30 minutes), "Simple" (6 or fewer ingredients), and "Kids Can Help Make It."

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Sources: [www.CASAfamilyday.org](http://www.CASAfamilyday.org); *Eat Right Montana, September 2007*; *Enriching Family Mealtimes Tool Kit, National Cattlemen's Beef Association*; "Family Meals," by Kim Leon and Leanne Spengler

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