



Annual Miami Lakes Car Show Funds Cancer Research at Sylvester

Before he lost his life to cancer in 2013, Roberto Alonso Sr. bought a vintage, cherry-red 1964 Chevelle because it was the same car he owned when he first started dating his wife of 42 years. Now, that classic car has become an important part of his family legacy.



The Alonso family presents check to Julio C. Barredo, M.D. at Sylvester Comprehensive Cancer Center

The Chevelle and hundreds of other classic cars were the featured attraction at this year's Miami Lakes Cars for a Cure, an annual event created by Alonso's family for the sole purpose of raising money for research at Sylvester Comprehensive Cancer Center, a part of UHealth – University of Miami Health System.

"The promise we made as a family is that we would never give up the fight," said Robert Alonso Jr. "My dad was a car enthusiast. Now his classic car and this car show are a part of his memory."

Roberto Alonso Sr., who served as the first vice-mayor of Miami Lakes, passed away from neuroendocrine carcinoid cancer in 2013. His family credits the innovative treatments he received at Sylvester for the extra time he got to spend with



his family.

"When my father was diagnosed, he was given little hope due to the lack of available treatments for his rare form of cancer," said Christine Alonso, one of Roberto Sr.'s two daughters. "But the doctors at Sylvester allowed him to fight with treatments that they were developing. Thanks to those trials, we had an extra 16 months to make memories with him."

Raising Research Dollars and Awareness



Stephen D. Nimer,
M.D.

In his honor, the family held their first car show six years ago with 40 cars. Now the event has grown to include more than 200 cars, a survivor's concert, and other events throughout the year. The proceeds are donated to Sylvester, the only NCI-designated cancer center in South Florida and one of only two in the state. The Alonso family says in addition to raising funds for research, they want to create awareness about Sylvester.

"The Alonso family is truly remarkable," said Stephen D. Nimer, M.D., director of Sylvester, the Oscar de la Renta Endowed Chair in Cancer Research, executive dean for research, and professor of medicine, biochemistry, and molecular biology at the University of Miami Miller School of Medicine. "Through their generosity, they have given hope to other cancer patients and their families. They are an inspiration to all of us, and we are grateful for their partnership."

In past years, the Miami Lakes Cars for a Cure Foundation has



designated its donation to the Sylvester general fund, but this year the group is specifically supporting pediatric cancer research, in honor of a Miami Lakes resident and fellow car enthusiast who recently lost his battle to pediatric brain cancer.

Community Involvement Brings Critical Funding



Julio C. Barredo, M.D

Julio C. Barredo, M.D., director of children's cancer programs and director of the Division of Pediatric Hematology-Oncology at Sylvester, and professor of pediatrics, medicine, biochemistry, and molecular biology, and the Toppel Family Endowed Chair in Pediatric Hematology-Oncology at the Miller School, is overseeing the research studies.

"This support from Miami Lakes Cars for a Cure is critical for pediatric cancer research, because very little federal money gets assigned to pediatric cancer research," Dr. Barredo said. "Without community involvement, we wouldn't be developing these programs that will lead to new treatments."

The entire Alonso family participates in the foundation. Roberto and his two sisters, Jessica and Christine, run the organization, and Roberto's grandchildren get involved at each event.

"As a family, we owe a lot to Sylvester," said Alexandra Alonso, Roberto Sr.'s daughter-in-law. "Almost 15 years ago, I was also treated at Sylvester for two types of cancer, and I'm a living example of what these doctors can do."

Everything used for the events is donated, allowing the



foundation to stick to its commitment of giving every dollar to cancer research.

“The community has been so supportive, and each year the car show keeps growing,” said Jessica. “I would love to see our foundation making six-figure donations to Sylvester in the next few years. My father wanted to help others with cancer, and we want to keep that going in his name.”

If you would like to join the Alonso family and the Miami Lakes Cars for a Cure Foundation in contributing to Sylvester Comprehensive Cancer Center, contact Megan Massacci at megan.massacci@med.miami.edu or 216-308-3286.

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