

Ice cream flavor honors young cancer victim

By Meredith Moss
Staff Writer

DAYTON — Four Dayton Graeter's stores have introduced a new ice cream flavor that will melt your heart.

Elena's Blueberry Pie Ice Cream memorializes a little girl from Cincinnati who lost her life to pediatric brain cancer. A percentage of the proceeds from the sale of the flavor goes to The Cure Starts Now Foundation that seeks a cure for the brutal and deadly disease.

The new ice cream flavor got its start at the organization's fundraising gala in 2008 where patrons had the chance to bid on "once in a lifetime experiences."

For Mark Groteke of Wyoming, a winning bid meant working with the Graeter family to develop and name his own vanity ice cream flavor. He selected a mixture of vanilla ice cream, blueberries and flaky pie crust, then named it to honor Elena Desserich, who had been in his daughter's kindergarten class. When the new flavor was introduced by the scoop last summer in Cincinnati, customers gobbled it up. It became so popular that Elena's flavor is now sold in pints

with her artwork on the carton. Fifty cents from each sale goes to the cause.

Melissa Saladonis, who grew up in Englewood, is assistant vice president of government relations at Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center and on the advisory board of The Cure Starts Now Foundation. Her daughter was also in Elena's kindergarten class.

"Elena was a very vibrant, healthy kindergartner who was inquisitive and loved writing and art," Saladonis says. After the little girl started slurring her words, she was brought to the emergency room at the hospital.

"They took a CAT scan and saw a major tumor," Saladonis remembers. "It's one of those things where the hearts of everyone in the emergency room sink because you know what it means."

Elena passed away in August 2007.

The Cure Starts Now Foundation began with a daily journal penned by Keith Desserich for his younger daughter and grew on the Web to include thousands of well-wishes. Many sent money, and Brooke and Keith Desserich decided to use it to start the foundation.

For more information on the organization, check out www.the-curestarts-nowfoundation.org.



Elena Desserich