

Filling Big Shoes

The sudden death of her father inspired Christine DiBona Lobley '99 to continue his generous legacy to others. She knew he would expect no less.

It wasn't until his death that the family of G. Fred DiBona Jr. realized the magnitude of his generosity. On January 11, 2005, at the age of 53, DiBona lost his battle against cancer. For months after his passing, the family heard an outpouring of stories about how DiBona helped others who were struggling with some kind of hardship. Christine DiBona Lobley '99 and her family knew they had an obligation to continue his philanthropy and dedication to helping others.

"My dad believed that 'to one who much is given, much is expected,'" says Lobley, who admits her father had a generous spirit, but he was also a businessman. "While I know he would certainly be proud of the work we are doing, he wouldn't be surprised that we chose to continue his legacy in this way. He raised us to appreciate philanthropy and have a strong sense of community."

So the question was how to build upon her father's legacy and his two greatest passions—children and health care. The answer was Fred's Footsteps. Established in 2005, the organization takes a unique approach to helping seriously ill, injured, or disabled children and their families by addressing their overwhelming financial expenses over a period of one year.

Fred's Footsteps is a family affair with Lobley acting as the executive director, her mom serving as board chair, and her brother participating as an active member. Lobley has built the organization from the ground up, spearheading the initial set up, and constructing program guidelines, financial models, and fundraising plans. She also crafted a strategic plan and communications model, whose structure has succeeded where other nonprofits failed during the unstable economic climate of 2008. Celebrating its 10th anniversary this year, Fred's Footsteps has assisted more than 500 families, providing \$3 million in funding, which is used mostly for mortgages, rent costs, and utilities.

Recipients learn about Fred's Footsteps through the group's partnerships with local hospitals such as the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia and Nemours/Alfred I. DuPont Hospital. Social workers and health care representatives refer families to the program, then a committee reviews the applications and selects families who meet the criteria. Additionally, the committee helps the families identify the areas where they need support.

One mother of a special-needs child knows the organization's generosity firsthand. "Their help has lifted us from what seemed like a never-ending life with debt. It has been yet another reminder of how much good is still in the world, and that we are never alone in the special-needs world. [Fred's Footsteps] provides miracles to families like ours, and we are forever grateful for this generosity."

While much of her spirit in giving comes from her family, Lobley credits her experiences at Notre Dame as being integral to her altruistic nature. "I always felt cared for [at Notre Dame] and invested in by my teachers, friends, and parents. This helped me to want to help others in the same fashion." Without a doubt, her father would be proud.

VISIONS – Academy of Notre Dame de Nemur (Summer 2015)