



Peter's Christmas Open House Party: All for St. Jude

by Susan Shamoon



Peter with his nephew R.J. who has been a patient at St. Jude, being treated since birth.



Named for Peter's sister Rhoda, the Breast Cancer Awareness Christmas tree was adorned with many special ornaments.



Last year, for many reasons, Peter Woods, owner of Peter's Pottery in Mound Bayou, wanted to create a new funding opportunity to help raise money for St. Jude Children's Research Hospital. He was moved to give back to the incredible organization that has given so much to his own family over the last few years.

St. Jude has one of the largest pediatric sickle cell programs in the country – treating children with sickle cell disease from birth through age 18. Peter's nephew R.J. is currently being treated at St. Jude under a clinical trial for Sickle Cell Anemia.

"They have been very successful in this trial study and the doctors say that R.J. is really a miracle because he has responded so well to the treatment, and he hasn't had to have his spleen removed. We are so thankful for their help," Peter stated.

"When R.J. goes to St. Jude there is no cost to our family, and while we have insurance, we have never received a bill for any of his care. I know they do the same for families whose children are being treated for cancer there. How do you thank someone for that?"

"I figured I could use what resources I have and decided to open up my new home to the public at Christmas, decorate it to the max with a Winter Wonderland theme, offer hors d'oeuvres, wine and other beverages for guests, and ask for a \$50 donation to St. Jude as an entry fee, so to speak, from everyone who attended.

"I sent out invitations to friends and business clients, and people came from all over the place. It was such a blessing to see everyone there who wanted to join me in supporting St. Jude. Some couldn't attend but sent checks payable to St. Jude to support it, anyway."

The entry way to his home was adorned with two five-foot-tall hand-painted wooden nutcrackers placed in the corners and thick, fresh garland accenting the heavy, 10-foot iron and glass doors. As guests stepped inside the foyer, Peter personally greeted them as he stood in front of "Rhoda's Tree," a Breast Cancer Awareness tree he created in memory of his sister who passed away six years ago. Ornaments on the tree are very unusual; many incorporate the pink breast cancer ribbon or a St. Jude logo. It was a fit introduction to the rest of the evening.

With a big smile on his face, Peter individually thanked everyone for coming to his first annual Winter Wonderland Benefit for St. Jude, inviting them to "be sure and get something to drink and enjoy the hors d'oeuvres in the dining room and in the kitchen before you begin to walk around the house."

The party was catered by Sweet Water Blues Catering of Rosedale, who kept the platters full and





On December 1 and 2, every guest will automatically be entered in the drawing for Peter's Pottery nativity scene.



This whimsical tree brings a smile to everyone.



Shrimp and sausage bites were just one of the many delicious offerings.

the food flowing all afternoon with bacon-wrapped shrimp, sausage sliders with slaw and pickles, and many other delicious hors d'oeuvres.

From the front door to the back, in every room on the first and second floors of this seven-thousand square-foot custom-built home, themed trees set the mood for Christmas while showcasing the incredible talent of friends Mary Anne Warrington Alford of Cleveland and Jane Nalty of Jackson.

"Mary Anne and I have been friends for close to 40 years. I knew she was a wedding decorator, and I asked her if she could help me pull off this feat of not only decorating my home for the holidays, but also for decorating 15 very tall and unusual Christmas trees that I wanted to showcase in my home for this special event.

"She was so excited and decorated my entire home way beyond my wildest imaginations. I gave her the idea of what I wanted for each tree, had all the decorations purchased and organized and ready for her to place on the trees. She added some additional touches that made each tree unique and full of personality." Upstairs in Peter's "man cave" was a personal favorite – an enormous whimsical-themed tree filled with oversized candy canes, red candy wrappers, peppermint themed

ornaments, and large elves peeking out from deep within the tree, some hanging upside down or sideways. Peter's favorite was the snow-covered tree in his office.

The dining table was adorned with two enormous gold deer Mary Anne had intertwined with beautiful white roses, garland and other greenery, creating an amazing holiday centerpiece. "Mary Anne is so talented, and this year I have asked her to come back and do it all over again, but it won't be the same decorations as last year.

"I went to market this past summer with this annual fundraiser in mind and bought tons of new decorations to use this year. So those who came last year won't see the same trees this year. It will all be fresh and new. And Mary Anne and Jane are going to do all the food this year. It will be wonderful, I'm sure," Peter stated.

Peter starts working in early October setting up his trees. "It takes a lot of time to put the trees in place around the house, locate the boxes that go with each tree, and rearrange the furniture so people can easily move throughout the house," he said. "It's a huge undertaking to say

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December 1 and 2, Peter is once again opening his new home to guests during his 2nd Annual Open House Benefiting St. Jude's Children's Research Hospital.



the least, but it's all worth it. Starting early also allows me to enjoy the season for as long as possible; it gives me the opportunity to host many parties throughout the season while my home is decorated so beautifully for this event."

Once the trees are placed, family members come in and fluff up the trees and get them ready for Mary Anne and Jane to decorate. It's a daunting task, to say the least. It takes about a week to decorate them all, and three or four days to undo the trees for storage until the next year.

"I have several extra storage rooms that I use to store the trees with an unbelievable number of boxes filled to the brim with decorations," Peter said. "We just move the naked trees into the storage room with that particular tree's decorations nearby. It's all very organized; it has to be."

Because last year's event was such a success and so well attended, Peter is extending this year to two days: Saturday, December 1 from 4 to 7 p.m., which will showcase the true effect of the lit trees at night; and Sunday afternoon, December 2, from 1 to 4 p.m., when Santa Claus will be on hand for the children to share their Christmas wishes. Peter's Pottery retail store, just across the street, will be open both days, just in case you find you need some additional items for Christmas gift giving.

Peter loves Christmas, and he is excited about the opportunity this is giving him to make a huge difference in the lives of the many children being treated at St. Jude. As he talks about it, his smile and eyes are as bright with excitement as the coming event.

Please accept his personal invitation to attend this year's event by donating \$50 to St. Jude. You'll get to tour his lovely new home, enjoy some fine food, sit around in his elaborate outdoor kitchen and entertainment area in the back directly behind his delightful swimming pool – all of which will be decorated for the event. Your \$50 donation to St.

Jude will also put your name in the hat for a coveted Peter's Pottery nativity set valued at \$600.

If you are unable to attend, you can still be included in the drawing for the \$600 nativity set with a \$50 tax-deductible donation to St. Jude. Please make your check payable to St. Jude Children's Research Hospital and mail to Peter's Pottery, 301 Fortune Avenue, Mound Bayou, MS 38762.

On December 1 and 2, drinks, delicious food, spectacular decorations, and a houseful of friends and familiar faces will fill this special holiday weekend once again. Don't miss it! For details or more information, please check out Peter's Pottery Facebook page @PetersPottery, or give Peter a call at 662-741-2283. 🌸



Friends from near and far enjoyed the open house as much as Mary Leftwich (sitting), Cleveland; Jane Letchworth (left), Shelby; and Betty Hood, Gunnison, did.



Ted Alford, Peter, Marilyn Alford and Dave Alford. The Alford's are from Cleveland; Dave is the husband of Mary Anne that decorated Peter's house.