

February 16, 2009 | **The Columbus Dispatch** | Circulation: 195,317

# 'The power of friendship'

## Thyroid-cancer patient buoyed by collective effort to help fight disease

By Jeffrey Sheban  
THE COLUMBUS DISPATCH

For two years now, Jessie Roby has battled thyroid cancer and all its unpleasantness: biopsies, surgeries, chemical cocktails and fears about recurrence.

Amid the hardship, though, she has discovered a heartwarming silver lining: a deeper meaning in friendship.

"She's basically like my sister," said 28-year-old Christa Gable, who has known Roby since the two shared a crib during afternoon naps while their mothers played cards.

"When someone you've known your whole life is sick, it kind of gets you in the gut."

Which explains why Gable — and many other friends of Roby's — wanted to help.

But how?

The 28-year-old graduate of Columbus School

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LEFT: Jessie, right, and lifelong friend Christa Gable, back in their dress-up days

### About the illness

► About 37,000 cases of thyroid cancer were diagnosed last year in the United States, with the incidence rising faster than that of most other types of cancer.

► Risk factors include exposure to radiation in the head or neck and a family history of the disease.

► Three times as many women as men are treated for the disease.

► Four of five sufferers are cured, but patients require lifelong monitoring.

► About 1,500 deaths a year are attributed to thyroid cancer.

Sources: Arthur G. James Cancer Hospital, National Cancer Institute

### THEME OF THE DAY

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**FRIENDSHIP**

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for Girls and of Ohio University in Athens has insurance through her family's businesses (including Roby Auto Group in Marysville) — so her medical bills are covered.

"I was thinking: How can we support her when there's really nothing else we can do?" recalled Courtney Karn, a 28-year-old lawyer with the firm Joseph & Joseph.

As the women tossed around ideas, Karn suggested assisting with the greater cause — thyroid-cancer research — in honor of their friend.

Roby was overwhelmed when they surprised her with their plans.

"I just broke down and started crying," she recalled.

The efforts of the past several months will bear fruit when the group of 15 hosts "Strike Out Thyroid Cancer," a Saturday fundraiser at AMF Sawmill Lanes ("Jessie loves bowling," friend Angela Vallera said, "so it's fitting").

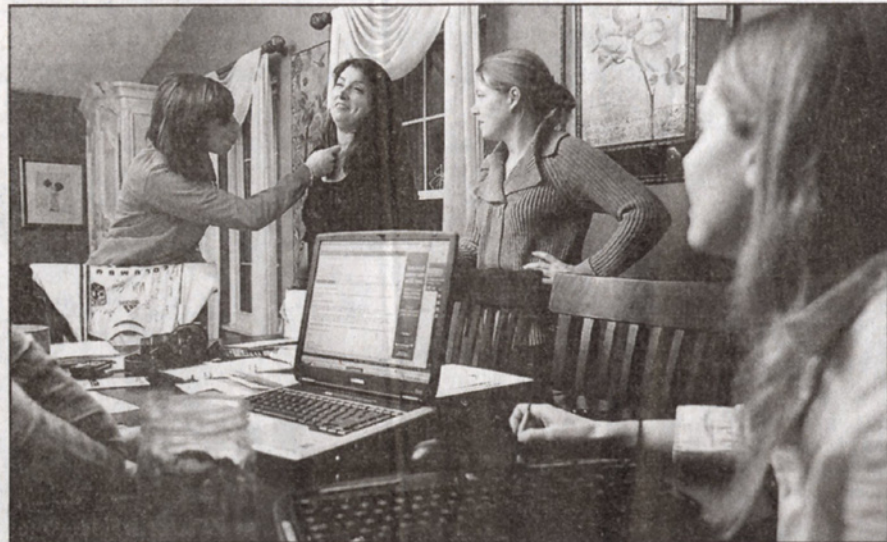
Profits from ticket sales for bowling and a silent auction will go toward clinical trials and research at the Arthur G. James Cancer Hospital.

Should the goal of \$15,000 be met, it would represent the largest amount raised specifically for thyroid-cancer research at the hospital, said Lindsay Weintraub, coordinator of fundraising events.

"It's really fantastic to see so many people come together," she said.

The James is the home of the nation's largest program for thyroid-cancer research.

Still, the disease doesn't get the clinical funding or public



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Amy Polkovitch examines Jessie Roby's scar from thyroid-cancer surgery during a planning meeting with Courtney Karn, center, and Jocelyn Reynolds.

**HOW TO HELP**

"Strike Out Thyroid Cancer," a fundraiser for the Arthur G. James Cancer Hospital that features bowling and a silent auction, will take place from 4 to 7 p.m. Saturday at AMF Sawmill Lanes, 4825 Sawmill Rd.

Tickets cost \$35, or \$25 for children 13 and younger — with two hours of bowling, pizza and soft drinks, and a T-shirt.

Auction items include hockey sticks signed by Manny Malhotra, Rick Nash and Rostislav Kelsa of the Columbus Blue Jackets.

For more information, visit [www.strikeoutthyroidcancer.com](http://www.strikeoutthyroidcancer.com).

attention that some other types of cancer do.

One reason: The disease is sometimes highly treatable.

It also afflicts a body part about which many people

don't know much: The butterfly-shaped gland, just above the collarbone, produces hormones.

"I was like 'What do you mean, my thyroid?' " said Roby, remembering her initial reaction to a CT scan in 2007 that revealed a suspicious lump in her throat.

She had been admitted to Riverside Methodist Hospital with severe chest pain and hadn't felt the golf-ball-sized tumor.

After a biopsy confirmed cancer, doctors removed her cancerous thyroid and two lymph nodes.

A year later, surgeons extracted seven more lymph nodes, five of them cancerous.

And her friends were inspired to help.

The women, many of them young professionals, were well-suited to the task, lend-

ing their skills in marketing, networking, fundraising and Web-site development.

Many of their employers have provided support, too.

To plan the event, the group met weekly at Roby's house in Upper Arlington.

"There is something to be said for the power of friendship," said Vallera, account supervisor with RMD Advertising of Columbus.

"We're not just helping Jessie with this; we want to touch the lives of other people."

The wealth of support from friends and family has meant the world to Roby, who, despite having cancer, considers herself fortunate.

"This event has allowed me to focus my energy on helping other people," she said. "It's helping me to see a bluer sky."

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Jessie Roby — with friends Courtney Karn, left, and Mandy Bosse — painting pins to be used as decorations during a bowling benefit

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