

# Girl's wish trip comes true in land of fantasy

BY DIANE GALE

A trip to Disney World was just what the LeCerc family needed after a winter of bad news.

Five-year-old Danielle LeCerc had fought cancer for three years and was thriving as the disease went into remission. That changed last January, when doctors announced she relapsed.

The nightmare of worry, pain and endless doctor visits began when she was 2 and her parents, Diane and Olivier, were concerned that she bruised a lot and was constantly tired.

"She would take a nap, wake up and say: 'Mom, I'm still tired; I'm going to take another nap,'" Diane said.

Doctors said she had acute lymphoblastic leukemia. Danielle underwent chemotherapy and immediately went into remission.

"She's very much aware of everything," Diane said. "At 2 1/2 she thought everyone went through what she did, and now she understands. She's very mature and very strong."

She got a reward last May when Rainbow Connection and Farmer Jack sent the LeCercs — Diane, Olivier, Danielle, and her brother, Mike, 3 — on an action-packed vacation to Disney World.

The family stayed at Give Kids the World Kids Village, for patients and their families who have life-threatening diseases.

"They were just wonderful to us," Diane said with tears in her eyes. "We had been through some very difficult months. And we were meeting families who were in all different phases of illness and recovery."

They supported each other with their stories. Sitting on her mother's lap in their Farmington Hills home, Danielle's face lights up when she says the village was

her favorite part of the trip.

Rainbow Connection, based in Rochester, provided the trip along with the Give Kids the World organization, which only charges \$300 for the five-night and six-day stay in a fantasy world where the kids are treated like royalty.

Families are met at the airport, given a rental car and provided with tickets to Disney World and all the theme parks in the area. Rainbow Connection also pays the airfare, airport limousine rides, and spending money for the family. Children at Kids Village wear special buttons that mean they don't have to wait in lines, and the animated characters shower them with special attention.

"I've had families call and say: 'I don't want to leave,'" said Suzanne Jones, Rainbow Connection executive director.

Rainbow Connection, founded in 1985 by L. Brooks Patterson, grants about 100 wishes annually to chronically and gravely ill youngsters. They do this through donations from individuals and corporations. Farmer Jack Supermarkets and participating vendors recently became a corporate sponsor.

"They've said to me: 'We will make sure no child will be without a wish,'" Jones said.

"Some of our children don't beat their illnesses, like John, who was dying of cancer," Jones said. "He wanted to see 'Saturday Night Live' tapes." At his wish, the family had a collage titled: "The best of our last times," and the pictures showed the family's trip to New York.

When a child survives an illness, they can look back and wonder the good times they had when their wish was granted, Jones said.



JOHN STOKESLAND/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Precious moments: Diane and Danielle LeCerc sit in their Farmington Hills home recalling the good times they had at Disney World.

Danielle has a regular reminder of her trip in letters from a little girl, Sarah, who had a bone marrow transplant a year ago, made a special impression on the LeCercs. She was an inspiration

to watch. Danielle has the most common type of leukemia, Diane LeCerc said.

"You hear so much about how many strides they've made and

overall the success is 60-70 percent," she added. "Once they relapse, they say it goes to 20-25 percent."

Danielle will start kindergarten in the fall. Meanwhile, she spends

time at her favorite hobbies: swimming, tennis and playing with neighborhood friends. Painting and coloring just about everything is another pastime. Rainbows are among her most common subjects.

## Pension counseling classes will explain your questions

What happens to a pension fund if an employer files for bankruptcy? Can a divorced woman claim a portion of her ex-husband's pension benefits? How does integration with Social Security reduce pension benefits? The answers to these and other pension questions are available through the Pension Information Assistance Program (PIAP), a pension counseling demonstration project, sponsored by Area Agency on Aging 1-B and funded through a grant from the Administration on Aging.

More than half of the retirees in the project target area of Macomb and Oakland counties rely on pensions as their first or second most important source of retirement income.

Many people don't realize that Social Security was never intended to provide an adequate retirement income for older adults.

### Doyle

Louis and Eleanor Doyle of Farmington recently celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary. They were married May 13, 1944, at Fort Street Presbyterian Church in Detroit. The family honored them by taking them out to dinner at the Country Epicure, a train ride on the Star Clipper in Walled Lake and other dinner surprises.

The couple moved to the Farmington area in 1961.

They have three daughters, Janet Petzold of Novi; Barbara Herman of Novi and Patricia Bruhan of Farmington.

They also have six grandchildren, Rob and Katie Herman; and Heidi, Pete, Chris and Jeff Bruhan.

Relatively few people have enough savings or investments to provide them with sufficient income, pension benefits make a critical difference in how most Americans live in retirement. Pension plans are often complicated, with perplexing formulas and confusing terms.

Trained Pension Information Assistance Program volunteer counselors can assist retirees in understanding and obtaining their pension benefits by providing them with basic information, counseling, advocacy and with referrals to other appropriate resources.

Providing technical support to the Pension Information Assistance Program is a professional network including the Pension Rights Center in Washington, D.C., a nonprofit organization dedicated to promoting and protecting pension rights, the Older Michiganian Legal Hotline, and a local steering committee comprised of pension experts involved in law, actuarial science, financial and retirement planning and governmental agencies that

regulate pensions. Pension counseling appointments can be arranged through

local senior centers which are serving as program sites or by contacting Diane Sands, pension

information assistance coordinator, at (313) 262-9218. There is no charge for this service.

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