

# Family to give in girl's memory

## Kids battling deadly illnesses will benefit

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Relatives of Mia Clements are hoping their angel can help other children this holiday season and into the future.

Family and friends of the Villa Park toddler — who died at 17 months in April 2004 after battling ailments stemming from a rare kidney disease — are officially launching their new not-for-profit group, Miracles from Mia, tonight at the village's annual Joyful Traditions event.

“Our purpose is to let people know that we are here. We're reorganized and we're building and getting ready to do some bigger things,” said Cheryl Russo, Mia's great aunt. “We want to give back to the community just like they gave to us.”

The reorganized and renamed group, which grew from the Miracles for Mia foundation that raised money to help pay for the girl's medical bills, has been in the works since her death. It aims to help families of children with chronic or life-threatening conditions, Russo said.

Help might come in the form of money, meals, grocery shopping or “chauffeur” service or other support, she said.

“We are so proud to assist other children and give back to the community, just as they so freely assisted us in any way they could,” Russo said. “We believe that miracles can and do happen.”

Mia Clements, daughter of Georgi and Frank Clements, became well known as an infant when people learned of her plight and held several fundraisers for the girl. Mia's plight gained a wider audience in the spring of 2004 when she and her mother stepped into the spotlight with Illinois first lady Patti Blagojevich to support an \$11 million expansion of Children's Memorial Hospital. During the press conference, it was announced that Georgi would be donating her kidney to Mia, but setbacks prevented the transplant from occurring.

Born several weeks premature and weighing little more than 3 pounds in November 2002, Mia suffered from bilateral multicystic dysplastic kidney disease. The condition left her with two failing kidneys — a condition her doctors called “extremely rare.”

Mia fought valiantly through several surgeries, countless hours of dialysis and numerous setbacks, which at times left her hospitalized for weeks and in a medically induced coma at times, relatives said.

“She'd look at you with those big eyes and she just captured your heart,” Russo said. “There was never a complaint out of her. She just kept plugging on. It was just amazing. She truly is my hero.”

Since Mia's brief life was filled with miracles — including overcoming some life-threatening

complications stemming from the disease — her legacy’s official debut seemed fitting for the holiday season, the season of miracles, relatives said. Miracles from Mia has a tree decked out in angels that will be illuminated Friday along with the dozens of other community groups’ trees along the Illinois Prairie Path in Villa Park.

The group, which hopes to keep a low-key presence, will hand out candy canes to youngsters during the Villa Park Chamber of Commerce’s festivities, which runs from 7 to 9 p.m. along the path at Ardmore Avenue and Park Boulevard.

“She restored a lot of people’s faith in humanity: There are still good people in the world that are willing to help,” great-uncle Si Russo said. “Now it’s our turn to help other people.”

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