



When A House Becomes a Home **JW House Fund**

by Ethan **Zielke**



As some of us scurry around this holiday season, jousting with the mall crowds for that perfect gift, others of us who haven't yet ventured out are pestering our

friends and loved-ones with that same old question that pops up every year: "What do you want for Christmas?" The question is often met with a blank look and a vague reply along the lines of "I don't know" or "Anything you get me will be fine." Only rarely does someone flat-out say, "Money" without receiving a surprised and scornful look for being so crass. But in the case of sixteen-year old Jan-Willem (JW) Knapen, it's not just the right answer, it's the only answer. And hardly a soul thinks twice about giving him what he asks for.


JW is afflicted with a virulent form of inoperable brain cancer that has turned his young life upside down and inside out and which has had him in and out of Kaiser Santa Clara hospital during the past two years. While other teens his age are looking forward to driving for the first time and going to school dances and preparing for SAT exams and college, JW has been battling for his life. His courage throughout the ordeal has been exemplary; the stuff of which heroes are made. And like most true heroes, he rarely puts himself first, even under the circumstances in which he now finds himself. In fact, the money he wants for Christmas (and the rest of the year, for that matter) isn't even for his own treatment. Rather, acquiring this money is his way of unselfishly giving something back to someone he says he "adores," his oncologist, Dr. Alan Wong, who has been the young boy's doctor since JW's brain tumor was originally

diagnosed. "He's done so much for me and I wanted to do something special in return for him," JW says.

Some time ago, during one of their many conversations, JW and Dr. Wong were lamenting the lack of an affordable place where families could stay while their children who underwent long and grueling treatments for various forms of cancer in the hospital. Families were having a tough enough

expensively accommodate families of young cancer patients at Kaiser Santa Clara's new campus. And when it became clear that he would be too ill to make the trip, the checks poured in anyway, some \$10,000 worth, \$2500 of which was donated by people who didn't even know him. Just like that, Dr. Wong's dream had suddenly been given a positive dose of reality. Soon after the \$10,000 check was presented to Dr. Wong, the JW House Fund was born.



So far, around \$100,000 of the \$250,000 needed to build just the structure has been raised. The facility will be similar to the Ronald McDonald houses at Stanford's Lucile Packard Children's Hospital and elsewhere around the world. Funds for the residence have been creatively—and widely—generated through a variety of means and events; from as small as the proceeds from children's lemonade stands and money in lieu of birthday gifts to high-profile auctions. "Doodles and Giggles," for example (an auction of JW's childhood art), which attracted over 300 people and raised nearly \$30,000 was staged on November 6th by the JW House Committee and chairs Barbara Mount and Helen Marchese Owen at the Triton Museum of Art in Santa Clara. Future fund raising plans include a December 19th benefit holiday concert featuring choral groups from Bellarmine Preparatory (where JW is a student) and Archbishop Mitty high schools. There are also plans to sell JW House wristbands and other JW House merchandise as well as a gala Tupperware party (to be hosted by JW House committee member Sherida Brinson) and a spring 2005 Dr. Alan Wong charity golf tournament. Judging from the progress made so far, it won't be long before Dr. Wong's and JW's dream will come true. 

time just dealing with their children's cancers and to have to worry about a place to stay or to have to sleep in an uncomfortable hospital chair night after night didn't seem at all fair. Moreover, hospitals don't provide an area where families can privately congregate and spend time with loved ones undergoing treatment. It all sounded like such a great idea, but after their conversation, Wong didn't think much about it. JW, however, did not forget.

Following a relapse of his tumor in April 2003 that prevented him and his family from returning to his native Belgium for a special reception in his home town, JW put his plan into action. Using his best Silicon Valley-like venture capital strategy, he had already asked the people in his home town to—rather than give him presents—instead donate money toward building a house that would in-