

# Janice Petrelli: A Profile in Positive Energy and Courage

by Kendal Norris



Photography by LaurenK

This year's Relay for Life at OakLeaf Plantation, raising funds for the American Cancer Society, will have special meaning for professional event planner Janice Petrelli, age 32. Last year, she gave the "survivor's speech" after battling her first horrific bout of the dreaded disease. This year she is the entertainment chair and is undergoing chemotherapy for a recurrence.

A native of Long Island, New York, Janice spent the first 28 years of her life in the hustle-bustle of that urban setting. Graduating from Long Island University/C.W. Post Campus with a B.S. in Marketing in 1999, she went to work for ADP as a marketing assistant in their investor relations department. There she dabbled in her special interest of event planning through dinner galas, trade shows and regional meetings. After four years she moved to McVeigh Associates, a professional meeting planning company catering to the pharmaceutical industry.

"My goals at the time were being seriously challenged, however," Janice noted, "as I was getting weary of the 'attitude,' road rage and high cost of living with only a 400 square foot apartment to call home." That's when she decided to move to Florida to start her own event planning company, Perfect Planning [www.perfectplanningllc.com]. Janice's best friend since first grade, Kristin Cushenbery, was a practicing nurse

in Jacksonville and she had visited the city numerous times to know it was a great setting to begin her business. She plans such events as corporate sales meetings, incentive programs, golf tournaments, and various types of corporate or private parties, including weddings.

Without any symptomatic warning, a routine gynecological exam in February 2007 revealed a "mass" in the pelvic area. A subsequent biopsy found malignancy, and in July Janice underwent a successful surgery on a tumor the size of a softball. Eighteen weeks of painful chemotherapy ensued. Janice said, "I knew I would lose my hair through this ordeal (it was the only time I allowed myself to cry), so I had already donated my long reddish hair to Locks of Love."

A majority of people would have given themselves permission to feel at least some self pity at this juncture, but that wasn't an option for the highly motivated, fireball personality of Janice Petrelli. As she said, "I had tremendous support from my family and friends, especially my best friend Kristin who was with me every day in the hospital taking care of me. It gave a new meaning to the word best friend. I was so grateful that I still had options the doctors seemed optimistic that I could walk away from this cured."

*"I knew I would lose my hair through this ordeal (it was the only time I allowed myself to cry), so I had already donated my long reddish hair to Locks of Love."*

But the news would turn dreadfully worse in May 2008 when doctors found another tumor in the same area – a peritoneal carcinoma – the day before Janice was scheduled to give the Relay for Life survivor's speech. Because of severe complications surrounding the location of the tumor, Janice went to Sloan Kettering in New York for a second opinion and had another operation in September 2008. It took three surgeons (including a plastic surgeon) 9 ½ hours to perform the necessary surgery and reconstruction.

As Janice remembered, "It was a brutal recovery because I had a hysterectomy and a temporary ileostomy to deal with." She spent three months in New York, again surrounded by family, and underwent "maintenance chemotherapy" that began in January of this year and is scheduled to end in May. At this point, further chemotherapy and radiation are not options if the cancer recurs.

All the while with the help of her Blackberry and her unfailing optimism, Janice was continuing to work on her event planning business, battling terrible nausea, non-functioning taste buds and constant heartburn and digestive problems. But as she noted, "I also felt a strong need to reach out to others, so I started counseling other cancer patients and after returning home, have begun a support group called 'Healing



Design Photo

Hands' that meets once a month. And I'm writing a book called It Is What It Is which I hope will be published."

Janice is also bringing her indomitable spirit and unflagging positive energy to the Relay for Life scheduled for 6pm Friday, May 22nd through noon, May 23, 2009 at the OakLeaf Athletic Center. Twenty plus teams will sponsor walkers who raise money ahead

## Janice Petrelli

of time slated for cancer research. Janice said, “We’ve got both kiddie and adult acts ranging from face painting, a clown and

a balloonist to a caricaturist, psychics, a hypnotist, massages, and various bands that will play throughout the night.



Design Photo

Local businesses are also very involved in selling raffles, baskets and food to raise funds.” Last year the Relay brought in \$35,000 and this year’s goal is \$40,000.

In Janice’s words, “I’ve learned that a positive mind frame is the most important thing. I live my life in hope day to day, grateful to God for all the positives in my life. I can’t change my fate, and no one knows the future. I just want people to remember me as being a happy and spunky person who lived life to its fullest. This is the hand I was dealt, and I could either play my cards or fold and I’ve never been a quitter.”



# OAKLEAF ARGYLE COUNCIL

## OakLeaf-Argyle Council Moves Full-Steam Ahead

By Kendal Norris

In both healthy and unsettling economic times, it’s helpful to have a body of concerned community members dedicated to providing resources and networking for area businesses. In the fall of 2008, such a group founded the OakLeaf-Argyle Council through the Clay County Chamber of Commerce. The OakLeaf-Argyle Chapter’s goal is to develop economic growth, business relationships, and support in and around OakLeaf Plantation.

The Council’s founding members are Chairwoman Lori Wagner, Vice President of the OakLeaf branch of Vystar Credit Union; Treasurer Valerie Grayson, owner of The Goddard School; Sheri Mullane, owner of PostNet; and Don Shamblin, Vice President of Watson Realty. For its opening session on October 8, 2008, the Council discussed the current business climate and the local real estate market.

Spearheading the Council’s start-up momentum is Lori Wagner who says, “We’re very excited to have this forum to communicate with Chamber members and other members of the public about programs, events and other relevant issues that will help strengthen our area’s business environment. As such, we’re promoting the formation of partnerships among OakLeaf-Argyle business people while working within the community.”

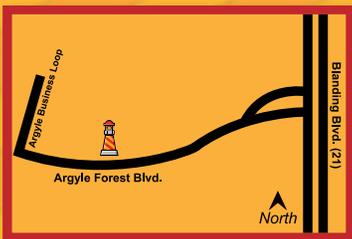
The OakLeaf-Argyle Council sponsors a luncheon at the Eagle Landing Golf & Country Club, each second Wednesday of the month from 11:30 am – 1:00 pm. Each meeting includes a guest speaker who makes a presentation about local happenings and ideas on how to provide support to

this growing community. There is a \$12 meal charge and the luncheons are open to the public. According to Lori Wagner, “We’ve had some great sessions so far that are addressing issues such as roads, police and fire services, schools, libraries, as well as business concerns. And we’ve had great attendance – with anywhere from 30 to 60 people.”

November’s speaker was Doug Conkey, the Clay County City Commissioner who spoke about the OakLeaf-Argyle area roadways and schools. Present were many school principals from Clay and Duval Counties. The December meeting was an all council Christmas luncheon at the Hilltop Restaurant. January’s agenda was presented by Davida Carter and Lori Meredith of VyStar Credit Union Investment Services who talked about surviving the current market, different retirement options, planning for the future and choices business owners can present to their employees. In February, Clay County Sheriff Rick Beseler spoke about neighborhood watch and crime prevention programs and future updates.

According to Lori Wagner, “The Council was created to serve as the primary point of contact for businesses in the membership area, and we’ve been fulfilling that purpose. At the same time, we’re looking forward to expanding both our Council membership as well as the Clay County Chamber of Commerce’s membership, since they are a great resource for news and events in Clay and Duval Counties.”

*To join the OakLeaf-Argyle Council or sponsor an upcoming luncheon, please contact Lori Wagner at 904-594-5501.*



NEXT TO ANYTIME FITNESS

6251-102 ARGYLE FOREST BLVD.  
JACKSONVILLE, FL 32244

904.317.6669

**HOURS**  
TUE - THUR 11: A.M. - 9 P.M.  
FRI - SAT: 11 A.M. - 10 P.M.  
SUN: 11 A.M. - 7 P.M.

**DAILY LUNCH SPECIALS**  
ONLY \$5.50  
(READY IN 5 MINUTES)

**WE DO DELIVERIES**  
(MINIMUM OF \$20)

**HAPPY HOUR:**  
3PM - 7PM (TUESDAY – FRIDAY)

**10% MILITARY DISCOUNT**

**DAILY BUFFET**