

Painting world with tulips a wish fulfilled

Tulip bulb sale spreads brain tumor awareness, honors Del. woman who died in 2004

BY ROBIN BROWN • THE NEWS JOURNAL • SEPTEMBER 1, 2008

Most people wouldn't think of tumors and tulips as being related.

If they knew Kelly Heinz-Grundner, a Delawarean whose love of tulips outlived her, they'd see the connection.

She died of a malignant brain tumor in 2004 at age 31. Her husband, Chris Grundner of Wilmington, began a foundation that year to raise awareness of brain tumors, discovered in about 176,000 people nationwide each year.

The foundation holds an annual fundraiser called "Tulips Against Tumors" to raise awareness of the disease and "to help honor those who are battling brain tumors now, our valiant brain tumor survivors, and those we have lost."

Orders for bulbs that are being imported from the Netherlands are being taken through Sept. 30, when payments also are due. A National Planting Day is set for Nov. 1. Color photos of this year's tulip choices are posted with order forms at www.TulipsAgainstTumors.com.

"If anyone doesn't have access to the Internet, we can take phone orders at the foundation at 427-2280," said Ed Weirauch, who is helping get out the word.

In the first year, nearly all orders came from Delaware, Weirauch said, but "we are noticing it spreading."

Tulips Against Tumors supporter Barbie Kremer of Greensboro, N.C., who orders online, was so pleased by the project – and the flower quality – she sent the foundation pictures of her son, Benjamin, with the blooms, she said. Other photos of tulips from the sale have come from as far as Michigan.

Weirauch hasn't decided what varieties he will order, but said, "I've got my pots ready."

Ten-bulb bags of single types cost \$10 and 25-bulb bags of special mixes – such as "Kelly's Special Blend" with her favorite purple and orange – cost \$25.

Bulbs also can be purchased and donated for public enjoyment in "KHG Memorial Gardens," being planted at Alfred I. duPont Hospital for Children in Rockland and the Helen F. Graham Cancer Center at Christiana Care in Stanton.

The idea of Tulips Against Tumors came from Grundner's mother, Susan Morrison, who lives in upstate New York. She shared her daughter-in-law's fondness for tulips and wrote about creating the fundraiser for the foundation, which she now serves as vice president.

"After Kelly was stricken with the brain tumor, I was beside myself with her suffering and wanted desperately to do something to let her know that she was in my heart every minute of every day, even though I was so far away," she wrote for the foundation Web site.

"It was then that Chris reminded me how much she loved tulips," she said. "I was thrilled, not only because I remembered the conversation she and I had years ago, but also because they were in season, so I was able to have some sent to her immediately."

Perhaps needless to say, her daughter-in-law loved them.

Morrison recalls Kelly saying how beautiful they were, how tulips always made her smile and how, if she could, she would "paint the whole world with tulips." She also recalls admiring tulips for being sturdy and resilient, "that the life within each bulb was so strong that even after being dormant and out of our sight for awhile, they always, always bloomed again.



Benjamin Kremer poses by a pot of tulips at his home in Greensboro, N.C. The bulbs were purchased from Tulips Against Tumors.

"As fate would have it, one of the next times I saw such beautiful tulips was at the luncheon following Kelly's memorial service," she wrote. "I'll never forget the sight of them – the room was overflowing with tulips of every color and type, each one a symbol of the love and utter grief of the hundreds of people who attended to bid her farewell that day."

Later, thinking about how to acknowledge Kelly's memory, the sight of all those tulips at her memorial came back to Morrison – along with her memory of Heinz-Grundner talking about painting the world with tulips.

The foundation began Tulips Against Tumors the next year.

Proceeds support not only programs to raise awareness of brain tumors, but also efforts to help patients and their families.

Organizers – recruiting volunteer and service groups to form tulip teams for sales – also encourage buying bulbs to give as gifts that have purpose and give flowers for years to come.

Among more than a dozen tulip teams already registered is the National Junior Honor Society at Cab Calloway School of the Arts, led by captain Stephanie Dexter.

Her team's tulip sales goal is \$1,000 – and help reaching it could come via the Internet. The foundation's Web site is set up so anyone can place orders from their team or any others.

Bulbs are delivered between Oct. 27 and Oct. 31.