

PRESS RELEASE: FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT:

July 30, 2015

Jessica Johnson

Lazy E Arena LLC

9600 Lazy E Drive, Guthrie, Oklahoma 73044

(405) 282-7433

St. Jude Barrel Jam announced

Caitlyn Garner's voice cracked with emotion as she talked about her second home – St. Jude Children's Research Hospital®.

On Thursday, St. Jude Children's Research Hospital, the Lazy E Arena and the Oklahoma Department of Agriculture, Food and Forestry hosted a press conference to announce an inaugural event called the St. Jude Barrel Jam, a national barrel racing event scheduled for October 2-4 at the Lazy E Arena.

When outstanding barrel racers from across the nation converge on the Lazy E Arena for the St. Jude Barrel Jam, they will not only race against the clock but more importantly, they will be helping children battling cancer and other life-threatening diseases at St. Jude Children's Research Hospital.

The press conference was held in the Blue Room of the state capitol building and Garner, 22, of Stigler, told how special it is to her that her second home – St. Jude – has a home for its new event in her home state of Oklahoma.

Two weeks shy of her sixth birthday, Garner was diagnosed with leukemia. She had turned 6 by the time she began her treatments at St. Jude in 1999. What could have been a challenging time for Garner is an experience she continues to treasure.

“At that time I was so young that I really didn't know what was going on and St. Jude just does such a great job of making you feel so comfortable and at home,” she said. “I honestly didn't even know I was sick. I was always up playing, I don't think I ever stopped for a minute, I was always running around. “It was a really awesome experience.”

And then her voice began to weaken.

“To this day, I will be at home sitting in my living room and I will tell my parents ‘I'm getting homesick’ and they know exactly what I mean,” Garner said. “That's just how much that St. Jude and everybody there, the faculty, the doctors and even the other patients and their families that we meet, that's just how much they mean to us.”

Garner, a student at Oklahoma State University, has been pronounced cured for 11 years now, but she continues to go back and participate in life studies, a long-term follow up on patients.

Sue Harpole, Senior Vice President, St. Jude, was among those speaking at the press conference and she said that with each child, once a member of the St. Jude family, always a member.

“Caitlyn is a St. Jude patient,” Harpole said. “Once you are a St. Jude patient you always are a St. Jude patient because we have the only childhood life study in the country.”

The fundraising event scheduled for early October at the Lazy E Arena is the first sanctioned St. Jude Barrel Jam and a new national program serving the barrel racing segment of the equestrian community.

“You think ‘What would be the most amazing way to kick this off?’ and there’s no question, any barrel racers dream arena is going to be to come to the Lazy E,” said Chris Thompson, St. Jude Sr. Director, Enterprise Architecture, who added that the Lazy E was “all in” from the start.

The owners of the event venue, Lazy E Arena, hope this is the beginning of a longstanding relationship with St. Jude Children’s Research Hospital.

The Lazy E Arena opened in 1984 and was purchased by the McKinney family in 2013 to maintain its reputation as the world’s premier western entertainment facility. The building sits southeast of Guthrie and northeast of Edmond/Oklahoma City and the main arena floor is 70,400 square feet, making it the largest indoor rodeo arena in the world.

Lazy E Ranch & Arena owners Micah and Leslie McKinney were among those speaking on Thursday.

“When we had the opportunity to look at this event and see what it could do for children, plus be on the innovative upstart of a new program nationwide, we were all in, we said, ‘Yes, absolutely,’” Micah McKinney said. “The Lazy E Arena has always been on the cusp of new innovative ideas and this could take off and be huge. Being a childhood cancer survivor myself anything that we could do for St. Jude and for cancer research just made it that much more special for us. So we’re very happy that you chose us.”

Oklahoma Secretary of Agriculture Jim Reese on Thursday said, “We know that the Lazy E and all of their staff are going to do everything that they can to make this successful. We know St. Jude is going to do everything they can to make this successful. We know the state of Oklahoma and Oklahoma citizens are going to do everything they can do. We still need spectators and we still need supporters. We want people to know that this event is going on so that they come, they support the event and they enjoy the event when it is held.”

St. Jude Children’s Research Hospital is leading the way the world understands, treats and defeats childhood cancer and other life-threatening diseases. Unlike any other hospital, the majority of funding for St. Jude comes from individual contributions. Thanks to generous donors, families never receive a bill from St. Jude for treatment, travel, housing or food – because all a family should worry about is helping their child live.

The mission of St. Jude Children’s Research Hospital is simple: finding cures and saving children. One reason the St. Jude mission is relevant to donors and sponsors everywhere is because St. Jude freely

shares its discoveries, so one child saved at St. Jude means doctors and scientists can use that knowledge to save thousands more children.

Those also on hand on Thursday included: Blayne Arthur, Deputy Commissioner for the Oklahoma Department of Agriculture, Food, and Forestry; Oklahoma Senator Ron Justice, Oklahoma Senator Eddie Fields, Oklahoma Representative John Pfeiffer; Cody Moseley and Laurie Fuller with the City of Guthrie; Greg “Heady” Coleman, Guthrie Chamber CEO; Cathy Williams-White, Director of Edmond CVB; Dan Wall, General Manager of the Lazy E Arena, and Robert Simpson, Lazy E Arena Director of Events, Marketing and Sponsorship.

“I just want to say thank you to you for hosting this event and I want to thank everybody in here for making this event possible,” Garner said. “Growing up around rodeo, it’s just so awesome to be able to join these two things together, because rodeo and horses and that kind of lifestyle is my passion and I’m also very passionate about fundraising for St. Jude, so it’s just a real honor to be able to join these two together.”

###

Photo captions:

Caitlyn Garner, talks about why St. Jude Children's Research Hospital and its new event, the St. Jude Barrel Jam, scheduled for October 2-4 at the Lazy E Arena, are special to her. A press conference was held in the Blue Room of the state capitol building to announce the St. Jude Barrel Jam.



Lazy E Ranch & Arena owners Micah, right, and Leslie McKinney were among those speaking on Thursday during a press conference to announce the St. Jude Barrel Jam, scheduled for October 2-4 at the Lazy E Arena. The press conference was held in the Blue Room of the state capitol building.

