

BUCKEYE CRUISE FOR CANCER

Trip Raises Money, Awareness For Cancer Research

By **MATTHEW HAGER**
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

It took a lot of work for Lisa Cisco to put together the Buckeye Cruise for Cancer.

She hopes it will go toward making the fight against cancer less challenging.

Cisco, daughter-in-law of former Buckeye football great Galen Cisco and owner of Travel Partners of Dublin, put together the cruise with the help of longtime clients Stefanie and Chris Spielman. The four-day, three-night Royal Caribbean cruise to the Bahamas Feb. 8-11 raised money for the Stefanie Spielman Fund for Breast Cancer Research at the Arthur G. James Cancer Hospital.

Cisco said it would be at least two months until she knows how much total money was raised through the cruise. Raffles and auctions on the cruise raised at least \$104,000.

That money, and the good times had by the 2,100 fans, former coaches and players alike, made all of the work in putting together the trip worth it, Cisco said.

"People could not believe how great the trip was," Cisco said. "It was like 'Field of Dreams.' It was hard selling, but I knew if I got people there they'd love it."

Putting the cruise together was a yearlong process. Cisco approached the Spielmans about raising awareness and money for breast cancer research through a Buckeye fan's dream vacation. Cisco booked an entire ship, the Majesty of the Seas, while the Spielmans found plenty of former Buckeyes eager to lend a hand.

"I was amazed how fast people jumped on board," Stefanie Spielman said. "We don't like to ask favors of our friends. If they want to participate in breast cancer fund-raising with us, that's great. But it's hard for us to ask people to jump on our cause. They seemed eager, almost waiting for us to ask them to jump on board. We had no trouble at all getting people to participate."

In all, more than 20 celebrity guests – Ohio State players, as well as former coaches Earle Bruce and John Cooper – agreed to come, as did the OSU alumni band, cheerleaders, Brutus Buckeye and OSU football historian Jack Park.

"It was an amazing time," Cisco said. "The player interaction couldn't have been scripted any better. They sang. They danced. They signed autographs graciously. They chatted with all of the fans. It was just incredible."

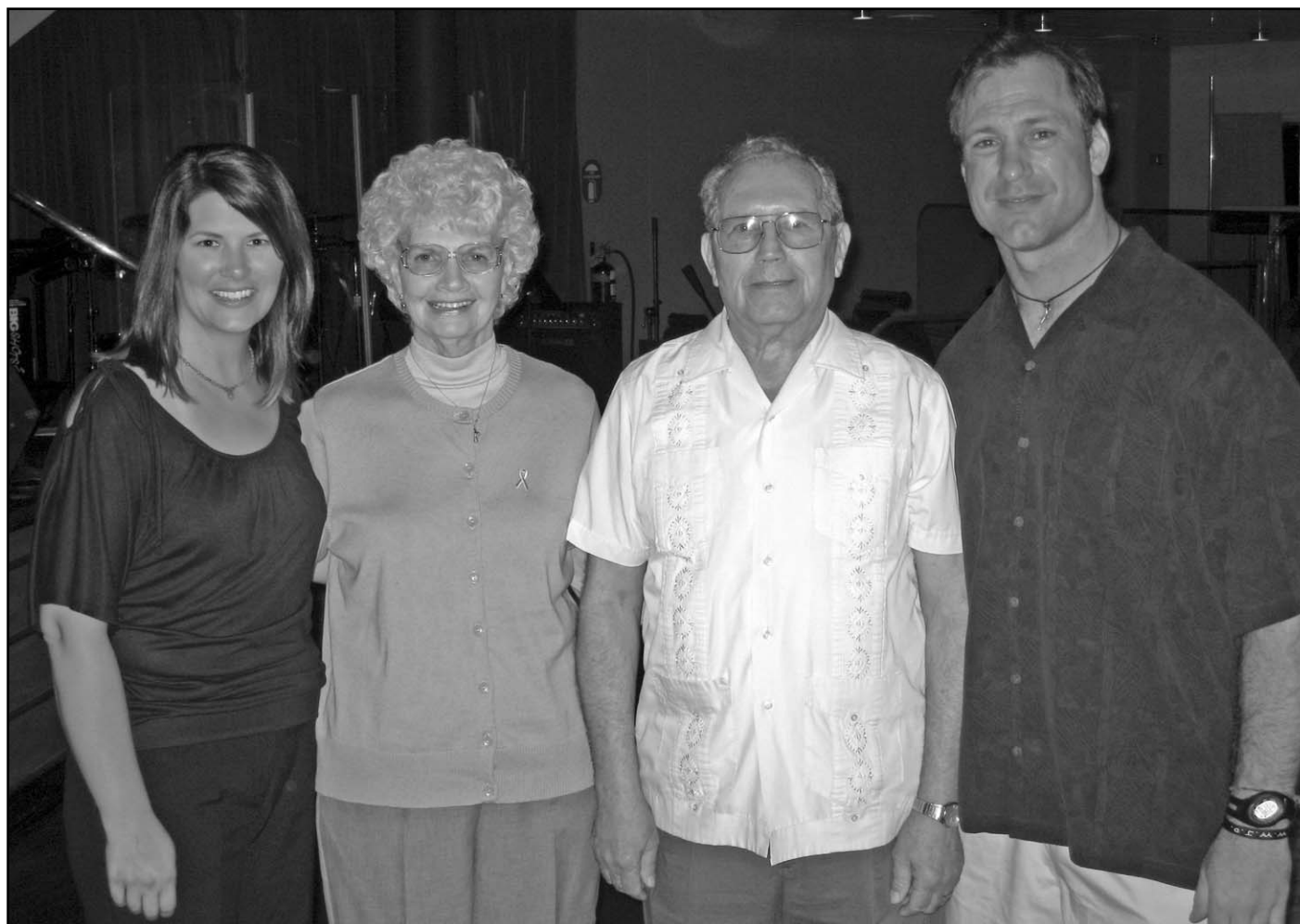
As the ship left Miami Feb. 8, the alumni band played the fight song and Park introduced all of the Buckeye guests to the fans in attendance. A Block "O" flag was also raised on the ship, as was a flag with a breast cancer ribbon on it.

"When you see those flags fly on the mast of the ship in the middle of the Caribbean, the goose bumps are there," Cisco said.

Once at sea, fans had a two-hour autograph session with the former Buckeyes on the ship. There were also the auctions and raffles during the cruise. Fans could win autographed memorabilia, two cars and much more.

"We gave away a lot," Cisco said. "Chris Spielman threw in his OSU-Michigan tickets, Kirk (Herbstreit) raffled off a flag and added a gameday experience. We even threw in a USC travel package for next season."

There was also a lot of entertainment on the ship. In addition to the alumni band, Grammy Award nominee Emerson Drive played, as did Mike Albert and the Big "E" Band, Kelly Crum Delaveris, the Sean Carney Band, Chris Logsdon, Karli Whetstone and Amanda Smigelsky. Even the Spielmans' son, Noah, played drums during the trip.



COURTESY OF BUCKEYE CRUISE FOR CANCER

CRUISE WINNERS – Stefanie and Chris Spielman flank Erma and Elmer Collins of Lima, Ohio, on the recent Buckeye Cruise for Cancer that helped raise money for the Stefanie Spielman Fund for Breast Cancer Research. The Collinses were the winners of a BSB contest that gave away a trip for two on the cruise.

One of the highlights of the activities was Buckeye karaoke. Participants sang for judges, a la "American Idol." Bobby Carpenter, Stefanie Spielman, Nick Mangold and Albert were the judges. Albert played the role of Simon Cowell, complete with a British accent and plain white T-shirt.

"It was the biggest hit," Cisco said. "The fans loved it. The place was packed. Bobby and Nick even sang and stole the show."

Canadian country band Emerson Drive was the headlining act and even missed the Grammys for the cruise. The band was nominated for Best Country Performance by a Duo or Group with Vocals for their song "Moments." The Eagles won the award for their song "How Long."

Even the celebrity guests were amazed at the experience.

"We knew it was going to be fun. We knew it was going to be successful, but it even exceeded our expectations," said Park, who also hosted a Buckeye trivia contest during the trip. "I felt very privileged to be a part of this program. My wife and I thoroughly enjoyed it."

Among the fans on the trip were Elmer and Erma Collins of Lima, Ohio, winners of the Buckeye Sports Bulletin contest that gave away a trip for two on the cruise. Elmer, 78, and Erma, 74, said it was the perfect trip.

"I had never won anything in my life before," Elmer said. "It was just wonderful. The weather was great – not too hot, not too cold. All of the (entertainment) programs were great. We were treated like royalty."

Elmer was almost a two-time winner by the time he returned home. He was a finalist in a game that gave away a car.

And to think Elmer almost had his wife unknowingly turn down the trip.

"I got the call (from BSB) and I said,

'Elmer, they said we've won a cruise,' and he told me to hang up because it had to be a joke," Erma said.

"I told her it had to be a jinx," Elmer said. "I didn't believe it until (BSB publisher) Frank Moskowitz picked up and told me it wasn't a jinx."

Elmer is a bigger Buckeye fan than his wife, but Erma had a tie to the trip's cause. She is a cancer survivor, having been diagnosed with non-Hodgkin's lymphoma in 1996.

"I was really happy to be there because it was a great cause," Erma said.

Elmer does not like flying or water, but other than some slight pain in his ears flying from Columbus to Miami, the trip went smoothly.

"He wasn't going to miss it," Erma said. "I'm glad we went."

Elmer's only regret was that he didn't get the autograph of his favorite Buckeye, A.J. Hawk.

As for whether the event will become an annual one, Cisco and Stefanie Spielman hope so.

"We're certainly planning on doing it again next year," Cisco said. "It takes a lot of work,

but I hope to do it again."

Said Spielman, "We are saying we would like to pursue it, but we need financial support. It costs a lot of money to charter a ship and organize a trip like this. If we could just get a lot of it underwritten and then let the rest fall into place, that would make it a lot easier for us to say we're for sure doing it again."

Cisco said the trip was a huge success. Even the weather was perfect – until they left port.

"The winds kicked up on Sunday as we were leaving Nassau," Cisco said. "We couldn't have asked for better weather. No one was going to rain on our parade."

Stefanie Spielman, who started taking a new oral chemotherapy in November that allows her to keep her hair and not feel nauseated or fatigued, said she was heartened by the experience.

"There were a lot of Buckeye fans there that had been touched by cancer, whether in their family or neighbors or friends," Spielman said. "That makes a unique group. It makes me feel like I'm not alone and it brings me a lot of hope. For me, the cruise was very uplifting."

ROOFING • WINDOWS • SIDING • MASONRY

WWW.ABLEROOF.COM

ABLE

614-444-7663

444-ROOF