

Buckeye ship to cruise for cause

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BY STEVE STEPHENS

Travel agency owner Linda Cisco faces a huge challenge.

But that's nothing compared with the challenge faced by her friend Stefanie Spielman.

Cisco and her company, Travel Partners in Dublin, have chartered an entire Royal Caribbean cruise ship, Majesty of the Seas, to raise money for the Stefanie Spielman Fund for Breast Cancer Research at the Arthur G. James Cancer Hospital.

Spielman, wife of former Ohio State and NFL football great Chris Spielman, found out she had breast cancer in 1998. The Spielmans will be the official hosts of the Buckeye Cruise for Cancer, a four-day, three-night cruise to the Bahamas Feb. 8-11. Also on board will be two dozen former Ohio State athletes and coaches from every era, from Hop Cassidy to A.J. Hawk.

Other former Buckeyes who have committed include Jay Burson, Bobby Carpenter, coach John Cooper, Kirk Herbstreit, Bob Hoying, Craig Krenzel, Mike Nugent and Dimitrious Stanley. They'll be doing everything from signing autographs to lecturing on past Buckeye glories to refereeing on-board shuffle-board games.

"We didn't have anyone who said they didn't want to do it," Cisco said. "And they're not just saying, 'Yeah, OK, I'll show up.' They're doing everything they can to help."

The outpouring of support has been wonderful, Mrs. Spielman said. "We realized we have a lot of friends who want to support our cause but maybe didn't know how," she said.

Joining the athletes, Cisco hopes, will be a few thousand paying passengers who are interested in meeting famous Buckeyes, enjoying a tropical getaway in midwinter and raising as much as \$1 million to fight cancer.

"We own the cruise ship for this trip," she said. "We'll be 2,500 Buckeye fans having fun and fighting cancer."

Cisco said she is the first travel agent to book an entire Royal Caribbean ship and has invested an immense amount of time and money in the project.

"You never can understand the power of Buckeye fans," Mrs. Spielman said.

"This has been a dream of mine for five years," Cisco said. "We're doing this as a labor of love."

But she believes she'll find enough travelers who love the Buckeyes and hate cancer to fill the boat, cover her expenses and raise at least \$500,000, the amount she guarantees will go to the Spielman Fund. (She hopes to raise twice that amount for the fund.)

Cisco has a personal interest in both the fight against breast cancer and in Buckeye

athletics.

Cisco's mother and grandmother both suffered breast cancer. Her father-in-law, Galen, played baseball and football at OSU and was a captain of the national-championship football team of 1957. Her husband, Galen Jr., was a varsity OSU baseball player. And her daughter, Nikki, was a captain of the 1998 Buckeye volleyball team.

The cruise will also include a Buckeye celebrity golf tournament; a signed-sports-memorabilia auction with items from Tiger Woods, Greg Oden, Shaquille O'Neal, Michael Jordan and others, as well as OSU football season tickets and a trip to the OSU bowl game; a national music act (yet to be announced); a commemorative gift and a day on a private island as well as the usual cruise amenities and entertainment.

Even less-ardent Buckeye fans will enjoy the cruise, Cisco promised. (Maize and blue swimwear is probably not a good idea, however.) And many who have signed up are interested mostly in the fight against cancer, she said. "I just had one lady who finished her last chemo treatment (for cancer) on Saturday," Cisco said, "and booked the cruise as a gift to herself."

Prices start at \$699 a person and include a \$200 donation to the Spielman Fund for Breast Cancer Research.

Sponsorship packages range in price from \$500 to \$25,000.

Several businesses have signed up and plan to offer cruises as employee rewards or sales incentives, Cisco said. "This is a really great way to have fun and make a huge contribution to cancer research while keeping those funds right here at the James," Mrs. Spielman said.

Travel Partners will be hosting a cruise night on June 27 at Buckeye Hall of Fame Cafe on Olentangy River Road. Information is available at 614-792-0002 or at www.travelpartnersindublin.com.

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