



Angie Silipigno Supporting Others with Her Life's Mission

COVER STORY

By Jenna Caputo

Photos by Super Source Media

Even from a very young age, Angie Silipigno always knew she was meant to help children. "For as long as I can remember, I knew I wanted to work in a hospital with children. I never knew what that would look like, but I knew in my heart that I wanted to work with pediatric patients. I knew I didn't want to be a nurse or doctor as I always envisioned myself engaged in activities with the patients. I had no idea how to even go about it, but it was on my heart and I couldn't let it go," remembers Angie.

Born in Columbus, Ohio, Angie moved with her family to Indiana when she was three years old. Her father followed his family's tradition of working for the railroad, and as the Director of Risk Management for Conrail, he was transferred again to Clifton Park when she was eight. Despite being an extremely shy child, Angie loved

spending time with her friends. Their house became the house that everyone hung out at and they would swim all day and enjoy sleepovers on the weekends.

She met her husband, Chris, in ninth grade. They immediately began dating, but it wasn't quite their time and they went their separate ways until junior year, when they started dating again. This time it stuck, and they ended up dating for almost 10 years before marrying. They are now looking forward to celebrating their 19th wedding anniversary this September. "He truly is my best friend," she says. "We have grown up together, faced so many of life's ups and downs together, and have just been so in sync with one another over the years. He's the fun-loving, always on the dance floor, light-hearted kind of guy that literally gives me the courage to step out of my comfort zone daily. He makes the girls and I belly laugh all the time and he rolls along with a smile in a household full of girls!"

Angie initially went into teaching special education, but her heart still longed for her dream of working in a hospital. When Chris had to relocate to New York City for his job, Angie found her chance. She obtained an internship at Mount Sinai and completed her certification as a Child Life Specialist and never looked back.

A Child Life Specialist is a member of the healthcare team who has expertise in child development and the impact of healthcare experiences on that development. It is her job to not only make sure a child understands their diagnosis through developmentally appropriate language and hands-on play activities with both pretend and real medical equipment to introduce them to all the sights and experiences they will encounter in their treatment, but to also help them develop coping strategies for the process ahead.



She quickly realized that she wanted to specialize in pediatric oncology and have the chance to establish long-term relationships with the patients and their families. "I realized very early on that this world of childhood cancer was a world all its own. A world that no one would ever want to become a part of, but one in which its citizens would find blessings in, feel a tremendous sense of community and find strength in the resources and supports available for them. Each day I was given the chance to share time with some of the most amazing, brave and determined individuals. What a tremendous privilege it's been to be able to come along side each family as they face the scariest moment of their lives, receiving their child's diagnosis of cancer." It became her mission to lift these families up, help carry their load and try to even get a giggle or smile out of both the child and parents.

She excelled at her job, and in 2014, received the very prestigious Employee of the Year award at Albany Medical Center. But after 10 years of working at the hospital in a clinical capacity, she realized she needed to shift her focus a bit and make a change. However, she knew she needed to still somehow be within the world of pediatric oncology.

Through her work at the hospital she often worked closely with Frank DeBlasi, founder of the Ballsfest Organization. After his own battle with cancer, Frank knew the importance of positivity on the healing process and wanted to create something to help others with cancer. He created Ballsfest with a mission of lifting the

hearts of children, teens and families impacted by cancer. It started as an annual "party," but since has grown into five different states with an annual signature event in each area that presents each "Baller" with a personalized gift or experience to celebrate their bravery and strength.

By spring of 2018, Frank shared with Angie that he had interest in expanding the services offered and would like to hire someone specifically to run the program. After giving it some thought, Angie thought that maybe this was the answer she had been looking for. "Before me was an opportunity to become a part of something I believed in whole-heartedly; something that would allow me to stay connected to the Melodies Center and the families I love so much - something so unique, so special and with so much potential," she says.

She took on her new role as Executive Director at Ballsfest, and began implementing year-round programs with supports for the families at all points of their cancer journey, both within the hospital setting as well as within the community. She is grateful to be able to maintain a relationship with the families she so loves while also having the opportunity to expand her reach outside of just the clinical world.

"Everyday there is a blank slate before me and a world of potential and possibility," she explains. "Each day provides me with a chance to go out into the community and share my passion for childhood cancer, tell stories of strength and courage of amazing children and families and hopefully inspire people to open their hearts to this cause. I feel tremendously grateful to live in a community where there are such wonderful business leaders to learn from,



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generous community supporters to build relationships with and endless opportunities to share our mission with." Unfortunately, there is not only a lack of federal funding for childhood cancer research, but also a lack of awareness. Not to mention the catastrophic impact a diagnosis has on a family not only emotionally, but also financially and socially as well. She is working to overcome these challenges every day.

At home, Angie and Chris' family now includes their 12-year-old twin daughters, Madeline Hope and Isabella Faith. Chris is the Chief Operating Officer at Renaissance Investment Group and the girls are heading into seventh grade at Acadia Middle School. Their family also includes a shih-tzu poodle mix puppy, Rosie, who is about to celebrate her second birthday. They are active in their church community and work to instill in their home a place that also values community involvement and supporting others. Her family helps her with volunteer events as well as supporting Chris' work at The City Mission of Schenectady. "This environment was an eye-opener for us and quickly shifted our life perspective as a family," says Angie. "We wanted our girls to understand poverty, how sometimes people are faced with difficult situations that have long-lasting implications, and how with love and support, people can transform their lives and have a new beginning. Since our girls were small, we have volunteered as a family at holiday meals, attended graduations for mission residents and spent time in fellowship with the people being served there." Chris also serves on the Board of Directors for the Shenendehowa Education Foundation and they are excited to support the innovative initiatives being made available to the school community.

They are a busy family, so they hold their family time together sacred. They eat dinner together most nights and Angie makes sure she bakes the girls a special birthday cake herself each year for their birthday, as well as hand makes all their Halloween costumes. Thanks to her mother-in-law, she and Chris have also been able to get in a date night alone together every weekend since the girls



were born, and they carve out time each weekend to do something all together as a family as well.

They all share a love of dessert, going to great lengths to find a yummy dessert no matter where they are! They often head up to Saratoga after church on Sundays to grab a coffee, stroll through the shops, and relax in Congress Park with a picnic. They spend a lot of time on Lake George, and in the winter, go skiing together. Angie enjoys being part of the Burn Boot Camp Community right here in Clifton Park and runs weekly with her girlfriends for a "fitness and chat" session.

Angie is passionate about "living the life you love," and often leans on Proverbs 3:6 as a mantra for her family – "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding."

"As the world becomes a tougher place to live in, I pray that our girls will continue to grow in their faith, maintain strong values, recognize the beauty of life and never pass up an opportunity to try new things," she says.

She is looking forward to another great year of events at Ballsfest and in continuing to expand their reach within the community, both with their events, and with their base of volunteers and sponsors that all have a heart for children and a desire to get involved in this exciting time of growth.

"I have always been so taken back by the tremendous generosity of our community," she says. "It is so touching to see the way this community rallies around those in need. We are thankful to be raising our children in the community we grew up in!"

For more information about the Ballsfest Organization, please visit ballsfest.org. ■

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