



**MAKING A DIFFERENCE**

## sweet charity

Gretchen Holt-Witt is baking up hope for sick kids while honoring the memory of her son

Early in 2007, Califon, New Jersey, mom Gretchen Holt-Witt noticed that her 2-year-old son, Liam, was running a fever and his nap patterns were off. “He had just started preschool and his pediatrician assured me it was simply his body’s way of responding to other kids’ germs,” explains Gretchen, the public relations manager for kitchenware company OXO. To rule out pneumonia and other illnesses, more tests were ordered. When the results came in, Gretchen, now 42, and her husband, Larry, found

out that Liam had neuroblastoma, an aggressive form of pediatric cancer. “I was astounded when Liam’s doctor told me cancer is the number-one disease killer of kids in the U.S.,” says Gretchen. “When I asked why more people don’t know this, he said, ‘Children don’t make headlines.’”

**Taking action** As Liam underwent surgery, chemotherapy and radiation, Gretchen became frustrated by the lack of funding for pediatric cancer research. “I learned of a new treatment that couldn’t be tested because

there was no money,” Gretchen recalls. “I thought, ‘OK, what can I do to raise some cash?’” Gretchen found the answer in one of her passions: cooking. “I don’t claim to be Julia Child, but I love to bake,” she says. With Christmas approaching, Gretchen recruited friends to help make cookies and sell them as gifts.

**Recipe for success** Soon, word spread and Gretchen’s small group of friends and family swelled to more than 250 volunteers. As orders poured in thanks to local media coverage, volunteers—including a group of local firemen who had “adopted” Liam—helped prep, bag and box the cookies. “To see these firemen daintily tying bows onto boxes of cookies overwhelmed me,” says Gretchen. Just six weeks after coming up with the idea, she sold out of cookies—raising more than \$420,000. “I looked at my husband and said, ‘I guess we’re on to something.’” So, the two set up Cookies for Kids’ Cancer to support pediatric cancer research.

**Keeping Liam’s spirit alive** Sadly, Gretchen’s son lost his cancer battle in January 2011, at age 6. “Liam was the inspiration behind this organization, but there are so many other kids out there fighting cancer,” says Gretchen, whose *Cookies for Kids’ Cancer Best Bake Sale Cookbook* hits stores September 6. In addition to the holiday cookie drive, CFKC helps people sponsor their own bake sales. All proceeds from these sales, which have raised over \$2 million since 2008, go to research grants awarded to scientists across the country. “I don’t want another child to have to deal with this horrific disease,” says Gretchen. *Brian Underwood*

*You can help! Learn how to sponsor your own bake sale by going to [cookiesforkidscancer.org](http://cookiesforkidscancer.org).*