Dante Gallucci, a tall, strong, healthy 14-year-old high school freshman, played basketball, ran track and was looking forward to another year as a starting lineman on the Schalmont High School varsity football team when, in May 2013, he was sidelined by a startling diagnosis of cancer.

He was referred immediately to the Melodies Center at the Bernard & Millie Duker Children’s Hospital at Albany Med, the only pediatric cancer facility in 25 counties in upstate New York and western New England.

Dante had a rare, aggressive type of cancer called T-cell lymphoblastic lymphoma that strikes young adults and requires immediate, intensive chemotherapy. The chemo claimed his hair, made him sick, left severe sores in his mouth, prompted weight loss and extreme weakness, and caused his blood counts to drop to anemic levels.

Managed by his physician, Dr. Jennifer Pearce, Dante participated in a clinical trial that had the potential to save his life. The side effects caused him to lose feeling in both his legs and feet, committing him to a wheel chair, but Dr. Pearce, by his side, assured him that he would walk again. And he did.
Today, at 16-years-old, Dante is in remission.

This model student and treasurer of his junior class returned to school full-time this month. Remarkably, he is back on the field as a lineman for the varsity football team.

Likened to a mighty oak tree, this deep-rooted, perseverant young man was stripped of his physical strength, but he never lost hope and he never gave in.

“Sure, it’s not something you want to have,” Dante said. “But it’s also something I wouldn’t take away now because of the special bonds I’ve made with the doctors, nurses and especially other kids at Albany Med.”

Please join Dante and his family for Dancing in the Woods on Friday, December 5, 2014 at The Armory at Sage as we celebrate his new beginning and the expert, compassionate care provided at the Melodies Center.

Dr. Joanne Porter, (left), Dante (center) and Dr. Jennifer Pearce (right)