

A Space of Their Own

Bald Beauties Project Donates \$150,000 for New Teen Room at Diamond Children's

By Valerie Vinyard

Michael and Maya Luria wanted to create something in memory of their daughter, Kelsey.

Kelsey was an 18-year-old Catalina Foothills High School student who died April 18, 2015, after a 5½ month battle with acute myeloid leukemia, a rare cancer in which the bone marrow produces a large number of abnormal blood cells.

The last months of Kelsey's life were spent at Diamond Children's Medical Center. A hospital stay – especially a long one – can be a tough atmosphere for anyone.

"When you're sick, you have no place to go," said Michael, who recalled walking laps around the wing with Kelsey. "We wanted a space that didn't look or feel like any part of the hospital."

So, the Lurias raised the \$150,000 to create the room, which is geared toward ages 13 and older.

The Teen Room opened on Apr. 12, which would have been Kelsey's 27th birthday. When you enter the cozy room, you'll notice a 75-inch flat screen television on one wall. Video game

controllers and DVDs make it feel less like a hospital and more of a fun respite.

Three changing picture screens line another wall. Teens can choose from various settings, including Paris, the beach or the jungle.

"We wanted to provide a window with a view outside the hospital walls," Maya said. "It was to give them a little bit of levity."

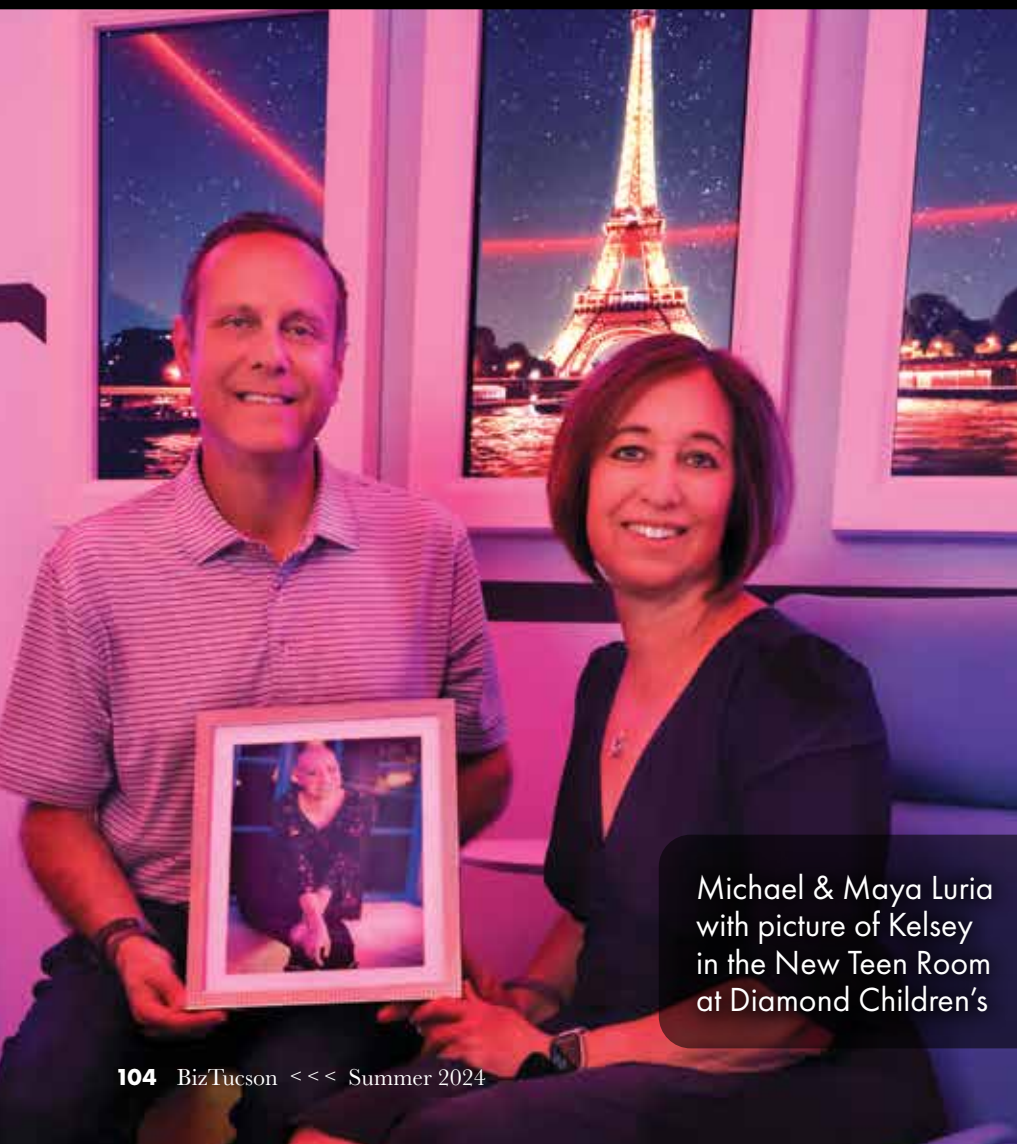
Emily Lynch has been a child life specialist at Diamond

Children's Medical Center for about two years. "I'm very excited about it," she said about the new room. "People have been enjoying themselves. It's been a very good space for kids to meet each other. It's a nice escape."

It's also a place to be social. In the months she spent at the hospital, Michael said that Kelsey had made friends with a fellow patient named Sarah. "I swear they looked like twins," he said. "But they had no place to go."

In the Teen Room, "these kids actually can meet another

continued on page 106 >>>



Michael & Maya Luria with picture of Kelsey in the New Teen Room at Diamond Children's



PHOTOS BY BRENT G. MATHIS



Bald Beauties Project Fulfills Kelsey Luria's Wish

By Valerie Vinyard

When Kelsey Luria was undergoing chemotherapy treatments for pediatric acute myeloid leukemia in 2015, she lost her hair.

"She was afraid of what she would look like after she lost her hair," her mother Maya Luria recalled. "She wanted a wig, she wouldn't let anyone see her."

The day before her second round of chemotherapy, Kelsey participated in a photo shoot. To her parents' surprise, she asked to do the shoot without her wig. "She left that day feeling so confident and so comfortable," Maya said. "She never wore that wig again."

Thus, the Bald Beauties Project was born. Its mission is to empower and impact the lives of children and young adults with cancer.

Although Kelsey lost her battle with cancer, her spirit, legacy and desire to positively impact the lives of children with cancer lives on through the project. "Her dying wish was for us to bring the Bald Beauties Project to life," said her father, Michael Luria.

With the Bald Beauties Project, kids with cancer have the opportunity to be professionally photographed and build self-esteem and confidence. The photo sessions take place around Tucson or at Banner Children's at Diamond Children's Medical Center.

Each family is connected with a professional photographer and make-up artist for a special experience to be remembered. Patients receive a flash drive of their images from the session as well as one image on a large canvas print.

The project also provides a Teen Comfort Kit to newly diagnosed/hospitalized teens. Packaged in a small duffel bag, each kit contains a plush blanket, eye mask, small pillow, ear buds, a Dammit Doll and other luxury items.

The Lurias noted that only 8% of all National Cancer Institute funding goes toward pediatric cancer research. So, in partnership with the Children's Oncology Group Foundation, the Bald Beauties Project supports ongoing research of AML. To date, the Bald Beauties Project has donated \$204,000 to Target Pediatric AML.

To raise funds for that research, the Bald Beauties Project has held an annual Bubbles and Brunch event since 2018. This year's event will take place Nov. 3 at Fleming's Prime Steakhouse and will include a silent auction. Tickets cost \$125, and the event is limited to 130 people.



“We wanted a space that didn't look or feel like any part of the hospital.”

– Michael Luria
Father of Kelsey Luria
Donor

continued from page 105

person," he said.

Courtney McClellan, associate director of the D6W, Pediatric Hematology/Oncology/BMT unit at Diamond Children's Medical Center, was excited to partner with the Lurias in opening the Teen Room.

"The goal for the space is to provide a location for the teenage population undergoing inpatient treatment, specifically for ages 13 to 18," McClellan said. "The space includes a large TV screen, three small screens with several chairs and LED lights. The patient can choose a 'color card' that changes the entire landscape of the room, including the LED light changes and backdrop screen rotations.

"We are hopeful that the teens who are needing a space away, away from the room where medications are given and where treatment is discussed, will experience the feeling of being outside of their room while still on the unit," she added.

Michael described the room as a subtle nod to Kelsey. "We wanted to be very sensitive for people going through their own battle."

The Lurias also have partnered with the New Jersey-based Arms Wide Open and Tucson's Courtney's Courage to host an annual weekend family bereavement retreat at Tanque Verde Guest Ranch. About 15 families each year are able to attend the event that offers support and sessions with a grief facilitator. It's a weekend of hope and healing.

The Teen Room, however, serves as a daily option for kids.

"At the end of the day, we know this is a resource that is needed that will be used for the next decade or more," Michael said. "Good things are going to happen in this space."

