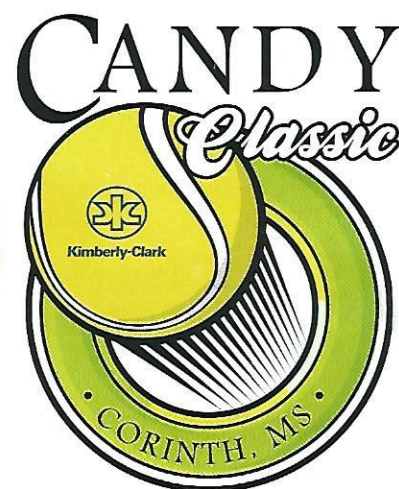


# SERVING UP LOVE

Local supporters show nothing but love for Corinth's annual Candy Classic Memorial tennis tournament.

*written by* Melanie Crownover



THE CANDY CLASSIC MEMORIAL is a United States Tennis Association-sanctioned event that has been a Corinth tradition since 1964, held in honor of Candy Hammond, a local girl who died of leukemia at age 10. Every year, around 150 tennis players and officials come to raise money for St. Jude Children's Research Hospital in her name.

Billy Gip Clark of Columbus is one of them. No stranger to the competitive tennis circuit, Clark is chairman of the Mississippi Tennis Association Officials Committee and officiates around 10 tournaments per season, including one in Jackson to rank USTA players. Even for this longtime tennis instructor, the Candy Classic stands out on his regular tournament schedule. He has officiated there for the past two years and says his third appearance will be extra special.

"I always looked forward to refereeing there because of what I knew they were trying to accomplish, but it's closer to home this year,"





Above, some of last year's winners, Karen Rickman and Teresa Pittman from Corinth and Gina True and Kristy Pelt from Germantown, Tennessee, pose for a picture. But the real winner is St. Jude Children's Research Hospital, which received \$12,000 after last year's tournament. At right, Cara Breedlove from Booneville plays in the 10 and under division.

he said. "A student who's been with me the past several months had just come back from treatment [at St. Jude] when she moved back. Just knowing what they did to help her get back on the court – and only in a couple of years – makes you realize how much we need to do things like this to support them."

Coordinators divide the tournament into a three-day adult division event and a two-day juniors competition. Beginner to experienced players can participate in singles and doubles matches for men, women or mixed teams. Local area USTA players and others from as far away as Illinois and Georgia attend.

In 2014, the name of the Corinth Candy Classic was changed to the Candy Classic

Memorial, and a new child was chosen to be honored by the fundraiser. Booneville native Amber Peek, who requested that her tumor be donated to St. Jude before her death, lost her six-year-long fight with brain cancer at age 13.

"She had wanted to leave a legacy and help other people, and she was always so worried about her friends at St. Jude," her mother Angie Worley said. "I knew immediately when they asked that this would be something she would have loved to be a part of, something that would really bring attention to childhood cancer."

The change into a memorial tournament not only gave officials the option to add more local honorees later on but also gave the fund-

raiser a boost in participation.

"We went from usually donating about \$7,500 each year before to almost \$9,000 that first year," assistant director Becky Nelms said. "Last year, we thought setting a \$10,000 goal was big, but we ended up raising \$12,000."

The funding is set up so that all sponsor donations go directly to St. Jude Children's Research Hospital. Expenses for the tournament are covered by entry fees, and local businesses also donate food, drinks, printing, advertising, tents and more to help keep costs low. Supporters like Candy's siblings, who still give even though they live out of state, can write their checks directly to St. Jude when they donate.

That transparency and the heart of its cause



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are the staying powers behind the competition, according to Nelms.

"Benefit tennis tournaments usually last only a few years. That says a lot about what our communities thought of these two girls," she said. "Our communities were devastated to lose them, but now we get to honor them every year to help other children who are still fighting their fight and the place that's helping them fight it."

The 2016 Candy Classic Memorial adult tournament takes place the weekend of May 20-22. Juniors play May 24-25. To register or get more information, visit [tennislink.usta.com](http://tennislink.usta.com), search "Candy Classic" on Facebook, or email [candyclasictennis@gmail.com](mailto:candyclasictennis@gmail.com).