

{Be the Change}

Be the Change starts at home

Alumnus honors sister and helps others with chronic illness

BY JAMES IRWIN ('06)

Adam Armiger ('07) wasn't thinking about changing the world. That approach wouldn't have made much sense. To change the world, you need to set out to change the world. You need to think macro — big, big, big. Armiger was envisioning something closer to home. He was thinking about Hope.

Armiger was 10 when his sister, Hope Marietta Armiger, passed away, 15 days after her birth, from complex congenital heart defects. By the time he enrolled at JMU, Armiger knew he wanted to do something to help better the lives of those affected by congenital heart defects or CHDs.

"I was very young when my sister was born and we were going through hard times," he recalls. "Some families deal with this for the entire lives of the kids, and it's expensive and takes a toll emotionally and financially."

More than a decade after losing his sister, Armiger, with help from fellow JMU alum Sean Wainwright ('06) made good on his goal and founded the Hope Marietta Foundation, keeping his sister's memory alive and raising awareness of congenital heart defects.

CHDs are the world's No. 1 birth ailment and the leading cause of all infant deaths in the United States, according to The Children's Heart Foundation. Despite CHDs claiming the lives of twice as many children as all childhood cancers combined, funding for research amounts to only one-third of that raised for cancer research.

Armiger's Washington, D.C.-based foundation focuses on those most affected by CHDs, helping support families in the area with medical expenses or funding admission to Camp Heartbeat, hosted by the Children's Hospital. Money and awareness are raised through events, including skeeball tournaments, stuffing stockings at the Children's Hospital and miniature golf at the H Street Country Club.

In February 2011 — during American Heart Month and Congenital Heart Week — the foundation hosted its first large-

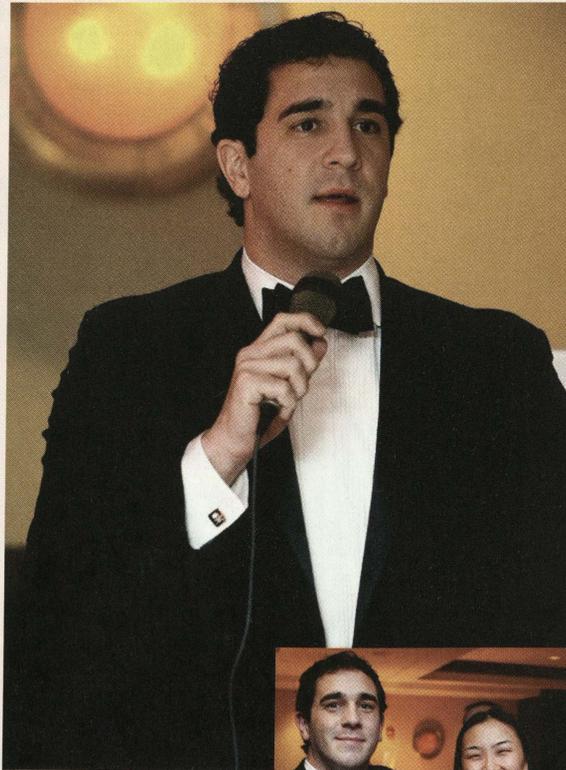
scale fundraiser, "Hope For Hearts Casino Night" in Arlington. More than 250 guests attended and helped raise \$10,000 for cardiac patient assistance funds at the Children's Hospital Foundation. The funds will assist needy families with hospital bills. Numbers for the February 2012 event were even higher — 330 guests raised \$17,000, which will purchase Fun Centers through the Mid-Atlantic Chapter of the Starlight Foundation to provide entertainment and family activities to children with chronic and life-threatening conditions.

A College of Business alumnus, Armiger says that helping families and children cope with the pain and isolation of prolonged illness is a mission rooted in philanthropy. "It's obvious to me that everyone could do a little bit more; everyone can give something," he says. "There are so many people and groups out there who need help."

Help, both in the form of donations and volunteers to run the foundation, has come in a wave of purple. Fellow JMU graduates Kerrin Delaney ('07), Cabell Dickinson ('06) and Wainwright serve on the Hope Marietta Foundation executive committee. Scores of Madison alumni attend foundation events in the Northern Virginia area, bringing awareness to the cause and keeping Hope's memory alive.

"One of the special things that has come out of this charity is that my sister is constantly in the minds of my friends and family," says Armiger. "That's really been something special that's come out of this."

A simple idea can make a difference. Changing the world doesn't need to begin on a grand scale. It can originate closer to home. The fight against CHDs is ongoing and yet, Armiger's foundation has found its way into the hearts and minds of those who believe in the power of something universal. In thinking about Hope, Adam Armiger has found a way to inspire hope. **M**
* Learn more about the Hope Marietta Foundation at the foundation's Facebook page or visit www.hopemariettafoundation.org.



(Top): Adam Armiger ('07) welcomes guests at the February 2012 Hope for Hearts Casino Night in Arlington, Va. (Right): Armiger shares a fun moment with Jamie Shin Bishop and Chris Bishop.