

January 2023

## *Celebrating a grand opening:* The 11 Day Power Play Cancer Resource Center



Dr. Johnson with Mike and Amy Lesakowski at the grand opening of The 11 Day Power Play Cancer Resource Center

### **A place where patients and their families can find information, support, comfort and connection throughout their cancer journeys.**

Going through cancer treatment can be one of the toughest times in a patient and their loved ones' lives. Thankfully, we have The 11 Day Power Play Cancer Resource Center at Roswell Park to ease some of the stressors faced.

This new center opened in September of 2022 for patients and families and offers a "soft place to land after a cancer diagnosis," said Martha Hickey, manager of The 11 Day Power Play Cancer Resource Center and Elevate Salon at Roswell Park. "At Roswell Park we come face to face with cancer every day. But we also see courage. This courage inspired us to enhance our patients' experience."

To accommodate for the growing patient population and need for the services available in the resource center, Roswell Park expanded the

footprint, also opening the Elevate Salon earlier this year. The 11 Day Power Play Cancer Resource Center will work in conjunction with the salon to offer wig and hair coverings to cancer patients experiencing hair loss due to treatment. In both spaces, visitors will feel the warmth and knowledge of our compassionate staff and volunteers.

For breast cancer survivor Mandy Berzer (pictured on back cover) — who helped celebrate the opening of the new center — the resource center team provided support and encouragement throughout her journey. "They were always there for me when I needed to vent, have a good laugh or a good cry," she said. "They were my dream team and offered practical solutions and comforting products during my treatment."

*(story continued on back page)*

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To learn more about the impact of your support, visit [RoswellPark.org/giving](https://RoswellPark.org/giving)

Roswell Park donors fuel groundbreaking research, exclusive clinical trials, innovative technology and compassionate patient care programs.







# RARE CANCERS: *from woodchucks to national renown*

*“Why don't you study woodchucks? They also get liver cancer.”*

That suggestion came in 2001 when Renuka Iyer, MD, was beginning her fellowship at Roswell Park Comprehensive Cancer Center. At the time, Roswell Park had far fewer liver cancer patients than it does today, she remembers, and no FDA-approved systemic therapies that improved survival or models with which to develop them. In order to get a study underway, Dr. Iyer needed to secure her very first grant. That's when donors stepped in.



Dr. Renuka Iyer, MD

The Roswell Park Alliance Foundation awarded Dr. Iyer an initial \$40,000 grant to start studying how liver cancer plagues woodchucks which, in the end, sparked so much more. Those donor funds enabled her to kickstart her research. She has continued in her work for years, securing larger grants from the

Alliance Foundation as well as external funding totaling \$6.4 million from the American Cancer Society, the National Comprehensive Cancer Network and other organizations. Those funds empowered her to fuel new investigations, bring about exciting discoveries and ultimately provide several new FDA-approved therapies for patients. Dr. Iyer's relentless curiosity and innovative research brought an idea from the lab to the clinic and to liver cancer patients everywhere.

## Leading the Way

Now, more than 20 years later, Dr. Iyer still primarily treats patients with liver cancers and has expanded her work to other cancers that affect the liver like neuroendocrine and biliary cancers, some of them very rare diseases. She holds a number of titles at Roswell Park: Professor of Oncology, Co-Leader for the Liver and Pancreas Tumor Program, Co-Leader for the Gastrointestinal Translational Research Group, Section Chief for Gastrointestinal Oncology, Vice Chair of Faculty Recruitment and Retention and Founder of the Roswell Park NET (neuroendocrine tumor) Biobank. Plus, another title she's incredibly proud of: mentor.

Through her many research initiatives and clinical trials, Dr. Iyer has had the opportunity to form relationships with more than a dozen young researchers at Roswell Park. Those mentees have gone on to develop successful research careers of their own and continue to shape cancer care in their own ways.

“I had a very nice mentor during my post doc who taught me to pay it forward,” Dr. Iyer said. “He shared how he lived: ‘You're not going to get all the answers, but if you teach enough people how to ask the right questions, together you will.’ That was a very powerful and valuable lesson that I was taught very early in my life. And so I felt like the only way I'm going to move forward and get it done is if I expand my army because there's only one of me.”

## Promising New Treatments

Beyond working directly with her patients, Dr. Iyer is passionate about pursuing research and clinical trials that bring new hope to her patients and their loved ones. For rare diseases such as the ones she treats, there are fewer treatment options and research initiatives than for more common cancer types.

**“Treating rare diseases is an honor and a challenge,” Dr. Iyer said, underlining her passion for finding new ways to fight these cancers. “These patients don't have many options. The only place you can go from there is up because you're starting at the bottom. Any work you do will be valuable.”**

She has also discovered that teamwork is invaluable. Collaboration within Roswell Park as well as with other clinician-researchers and organizations nation-wide and world-wide has brought several clinical trials to Roswell Park — and more to come. In great part thanks to the fierce dedication of Dr. Iyer, Roswell Park has the highest number of neuroendocrine cancer clinical trials in the country.

**“Clinical trials go to reputed cancer centers with high volume,” Dr. Iyer explained. “And we are a nationally known neuroendocrine center.”**

At Roswell Park, an emerging field of precision medicine called theranostics is taking off. In standard care, a cancer patient goes through a diagnostic phase to diagnose and stage their cancer, followed by treatment, radiation or therapeutics. Theranostics — a combination of therapeutics and diagnostics — is becoming available to a growing number of patients who have otherwise exhausted their treatment options.

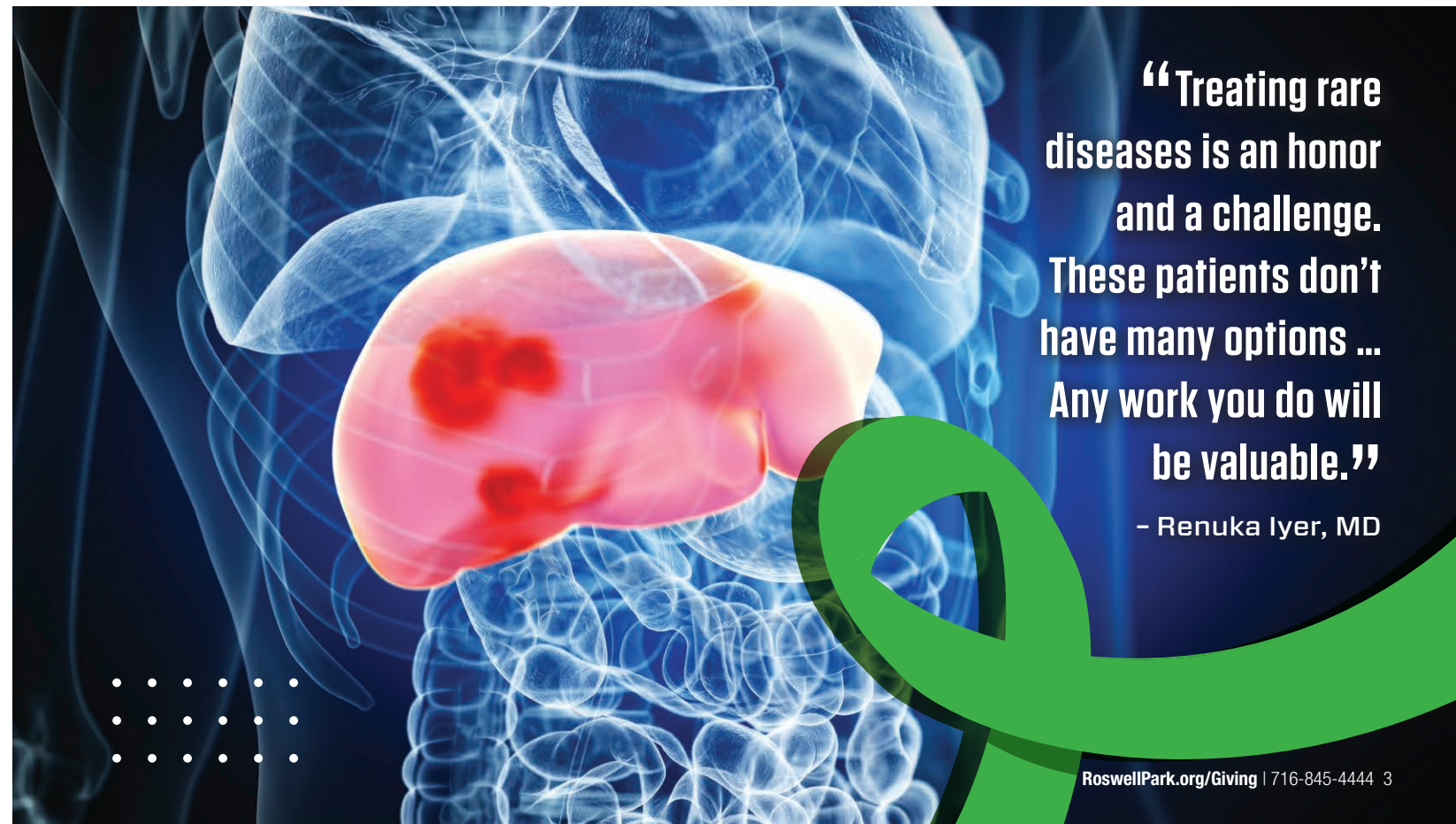
This approach first came to Roswell Park through Dr. Iyer's efforts. Initially, Roswell Park was able to treat patients with metastatic neuroendocrine cancer in a way that truly improved their quality of life — something other existing treatments had not yet been able to improve, Dr. Iyer said. With the expansion of the theranostics program at Roswell Park, Dr. Iyer and other clinicians are confident this will open doors for further research and clinical trials to bring this groundbreaking treatment to more patients. Support from donors is helping fuel this expansion at Roswell Park.

## Donor Funding Paved the Way

All of this work was set in motion by the generosity of Roswell Park donors. **Supporters like you put their trust in the experts and innovators at Roswell Park and paved the way for advancements we couldn't have foreseen years ago.**

“I could not have articulated to you in 2006 what was going to happen in the field,” Dr. Iyer said. “All the work, how the world would change and how we would achieve everything we have. I could have never imagined that at that time.”

A grant providing seed money to begin liver cancer research in the lab launched a career that has helped shape the way we treat many cancers in the liver today. And those advancements will continue on until 20 years from now, when we look back and see how your generosity has made way for even more incredible discoveries that are just around the corner.



**“Treating rare diseases is an honor and a challenge. These patients don't have many options ... Any work you do will be valuable.”**

— Renuka Iyer, MD



# Courage of Carly celebrates *the return to togetherness*

When 8-year-old Carly Collard Cottone was diagnosed with brain cancer, she knew she wanted to make a difference for other kids like her fighting cancer and blood disorders. She was up against something tough, but it was a challenge she faced with courage and optimism. On her 9th birthday in 2000, with the help of family, friends and Roswell Park, she established the Courage of Carly Fund.

Sadly, Carly lost her courageous battle, but Courage of Carly Fund members, Roswell Park staff and physicians and hundreds of donors continue to carry on her memory and vision. Fast forward 22 years, and the Courage of Carly Fund offers individualized support to hundreds of pediatric cancer and blood disorder



patients and their loved ones. While Carly is no longer with us, her generosity lives on in this robust program made possible by donor support.

The Courage of Carly Fund gives children with cancer and blood disorders the fighting chance they deserve. Providing everything from unforgettable moments and family events to financial support and promising scientific research, we offer hope and a little bit of extra happiness to children, teens and their families. The Courage of Carly Fund community currently serves over 300 active households: 230 oncology families and 96 hematology families.

In 2022, donor support made so much possible for Roswell Park's youngest cancer patients.

**“I am so thankful for  
Courage of Carly. They have done so  
many amazing things for me, my family  
and so many other kids like me.”**  
- Colt, patient



## Bringing a Little Extra Joy

CCF hosts diversionary programs to take our patients' and families' attention away from the stress, anxiety and challenges of treatment and give them a moment to enjoy themselves.

Last year, the kids and their families were able to enjoy more activities and events together that they missed out on during the earlier years of the pandemic. Then and now, the health and safety of our young patients and their families are our top priority.

### Courage of Carly members were able to celebrate events like:

- Laser Tag Battle Royale with the Buffalo Sabres
- Summer Luau in Kaminski Park
- Christmas in August
- A visit to Stillwater Farm
- Teen Prom "Roschella" at Larkin (bottom left)
- Super Sibling Appreciation Night (top right)
- A Halloween movie at the Aurora Theatre
- Trunk or Treat (bottom right)
- 12 Days of Holiday Magic presented by the Wanakah 100 Holes Golf Tournament (middle right)
- And so much more!

## Pursuing New Treatments

But it's not just about programs and events for pediatrics cancer and blood disorder patients — the Courage of Carly Fund is doing even more for the future of cancer.

Only 4% of federal funding for cancer research is designated for childhood cancers. That means donor support and community fundraising are crucial to bring this research to life. The world-renowned physicians and researchers at Roswell Park Comprehensive Cancer Center often have ideas that could change the course of treatment for children and lead to cures. But without funding, their ideas would never get off the ground. That's where you come in.

Donations to the Courage of Carly Fund help close the gap in federal funding to allow researchers to take their ideas and turn them into reality so more lives can be saved. Donations to the Courage of Carly Fund provide seed funding to launch new research projects and make way for the exploration of new therapeutic options that could lead to new standards of care.

When a child is diagnosed with something as serious as cancer or a blood disorder, the entire family is affected and the Courage of Carly Fund is there to help with not only diversionary programs and funding but also emotional and psychosocial support needed by each member of the family.



To learn more about the impact of the  
Courage of Carly Fund and read inspiring stories,  
visit [CourageofCarlyfund.org](https://www.CourageofCarlyfund.org).



# Empowering Roswell Park nurses to reach new heights



The Marie Bogner Center for Nursing Excellence opened its doors to nurses in late 2022

There are more than 700 nurses who have dedicated their careers to caring for patients at Roswell Park. These highly skilled individuals bring their expertise and compassion to work every day for the sake of the tens of thousands of people coming to Roswell Park in search of hope.

Now, Roswell Park Comprehensive Cancer Center is putting an added emphasis on nursing professional development, practice and research with the opening of the Marie Bogner Center for Nursing Excellence. Through a generous legacy gift, longtime Roswell Park supporter Marie Bogner provided for the complete renovation of a professional development space for our nursing staff.

Comprehensive care is what sets Roswell Park apart. The Marie Bogner Center for Nursing Excellence allows nurses to provide the latest integrated care to cancer patients in a profession that is changing and advancing at a brisk pace. The new center includes state-of-the-art devices and equipment in a realistic simulation lab environment. These new renovations enable our nursing staff to learn the latest techniques, guidance and best practices to better equip them to care for our cancer patients.



Mary Ann Long, RN, MS

**“This new space really demonstrates that there’s a value placed on what nurses bring to the table at Roswell Park,”** said Mary Ann Long, RN, MS, Senior Vice President and Chief Nursing Officer.



Andrew Storer, PhD, DNP, FNP-C, ACNP-BC, FAANP

**“We want to be able to deliver the latest, the most advanced care to our patients,”** said Andrew Storer, PhD, DNP, FNP-C, ACNP-BC, FAANP, Vice President and Deputy Chief Nursing Officer. **“The technology, the science, the literature is changing so much that we have to provide education on**

**an ongoing basis to ensure our nurses are delivering that when they provide care in patient care areas.”**

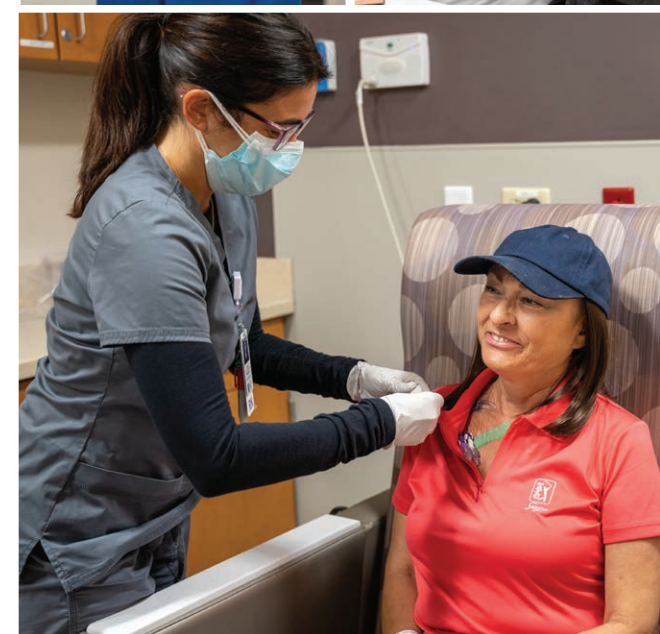
Creating the Marie Bogner Center for Nursing Excellence with all relevant resources dedicated to professional development and advancement demonstrates Roswell Park’s commitment to both nurses and patients. Nurses are in high demand around the globe. Placing an emphasis on their invaluable work at Roswell Park will offer a seldom seen opportunity for nurses striving to

use their skills alongside other top clinicians here in Buffalo. It shows an intentional investment in their careers and contributions to medical care.

**“Nurses are the individuals who spend the majority of their time at the bedside,”** Mary Ann Long said. **“We want to not only educate nurses but empower nurses as well to be the best clinicians they can possibly be, the best patient advocates.”**

In addition to the physical space, the Department of Nursing is working to incorporate protected time into nurses’ schedules devoted to professional development. This effort, tied to the Continuous Clinical Advancement Program, complements the creation of this enhanced space for Roswell Park nurses to learn. The nursing staff is encouraged to aim high and chase career goals that align with their expertise and interests. The program will give nurses the time and freedom to work toward their ambitions and ideas to continue to improve care, while the space provides them with a convenient, dedicated location in which to do just that.

Taking this initiative one step further, donors have made it possible to create an endowment to provide the Marie Bogner Center for Nursing Excellence with a vital and stable source of funding to ensure the continuation and expansion of the program and maintain this core resource for our nurses for years to come. The support of generous donors like you are making a profound impact on the advancement of innovative patient care at Roswell Park for decades to come.



## Donor Spotlight Marie Bogner



Marie Bogner was so grateful for the care that both she and her mother received at Roswell Park that she made a legacy gift. She wanted to honor Roswell Park’s dedicated nurses with a gift that would benefit patients and provide additional educational resources for the nursing staff who had been so kind to her mother. A longtime resident of Orchard Park, Marie made several gifts to Roswell Park, both during her lifetime as well as through her estate plans. Marie’s thoughtful gifts established not only the nursing center but also:

- The Marie, Maria and Michael Bogner, Sr. Patient Terrace
- The Marie E. Bogner and Maria T. Bogner Endowment for Colon Cancer Awareness and Early Detection

**We are grateful for Marie’s support of Roswell Park and our mission.**





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The newly renovated space is located on the first floor of the hospital by the tower elevators, near the Sunflower Café, not far from the former resource center. Here, patients and their families can find information, support, comfort and connection. Services in the new space include patient education, wellness activities, self-care and materials for entertainment and comfort.

**“This will really be a destination for our patients and their support team,” said Candace S. Johnson, PhD, Roswell Park President & CEO and M&T Bank Presidential Chair in Leadership.**

This resource is possible thanks to donations from The 11 Day Power Play organization and their dedicated support of the Roswell Park mission. Their contributions to Roswell Park have grown to over \$5.5 million over the years. The organization’s name also graces The 11 Day Power Play Cell Therapy Center which is moving forward groundbreaking new research every day.

“Roswell Park is always evolving and I think that’s so exciting,” explained Amy Lesakowski, cancer survivor and co-founder of The 11 Day Power Play. She recognized all the players and community members who have contributed to their efforts, giving of their time and making donations because they, too, believe in the mission. **“We know this beautiful new space will provide the necessary respite, hope and resources cancer patients and their families need. We are proud and honored to have it bear The 11 Day Power Play name.”**

In addition to donations from The 11 Day Power Play, the new cancer resource center was made possible thanks to donations from the community, the Buffalo Sabres, the West Herr Automotive Group, Michael and Michelle Gacioch and The Zeron Foundation.



With... to  
The 11 Day Power Play



Mandy, Roswell Park patient