

Donor Dollars at Work

Fall 2015



Heal, Sit and Stay
Donations Help Bring
Man's Best Friend to
Roswell Park

Porsche is one of 12 pet therapy dogs that visits Roswell Park patients.

Although Porsche never went to medical school, she sure knows how to make cancer patients and their families feel better.

Porsche, a 6-year-old Goldendoodle, is a new face at Roswell Park. Roswell's furry friend visits a few times a month as part of the Institute's Pet Therapy Program. Coordination of the program is made possible in part by generous donations, and during her visits, Porsche trots around the hospital, calmly visiting anyone in need of a pick-me-up, providing unconditional love and a wag of her tail.

She's only been volunteering with her owner, Sherry Sutton, for a few months, however, Porsche is already known for her signature trick – she gives her paw to almost everyone she meets.

"It always just makes me smile," Cheryl Thompson, a patient who comes to Roswell Park for treatment once a week, said while visiting with Porsche. "Dogs are very therapeutic, and it kind of makes you forget where you are for a moment."

Twelve dogs of all different shapes and sizes take part in the Pet Therapy Program, and one of the dogs visits Roswell Park almost every day. In addition to Porsche, there's also Sierra, a beagle known for her ability to bark "hello," Pepper, a Labrador that pediatric patients have nicknamed Dr. Pepper, and two West Highland terriers who are often dressed up in matching outfits — just to name a few.

Like many of the patient-care programs at Roswell Park that provide social and emotional support, the Pet Therapy Program is made possible by support from the community. Patients consistently rate the program as one of their favorites, and studies show that these furry volunteers can improve wellbeing and morale, as well as reduce feelings of loneliness and depression.

But you don't need to read a study to see the joy that these dogs can bring.

"If you walk through the waiting rooms, you can see that patients and their families are understandably preoccupied. They are thinking, 'what's going to happen with my next treatment, what tests do I have next?,' said Nicole Gerber, a Roswell Park employee who, along with her English Setter, Monty, helped start the Pet Therapy Program in 2006. "When those patients see one of the pet therapy dogs, a smile comes over their face and you can sense a weight of worry or pain is relieved, even if only for a moment."

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The Breast Resource Center: *A Source of Support and Companionship*

Even though it was more than six years ago, Megan Colosimo's memory of the day she was diagnosed with breast cancer is crystal clear.

"It was late in the day on the Friday before Memorial Day. I remember I had a bad feeling about it, because I was told the doctor was waiting for me," Megan said.

She was only 30 years old at the time, and had no family history of breast cancer. She had found a lump in her breast a few weeks earlier, and had come to Roswell Park to get it checked out.

"When the doctors told me it was cancer, I was in a complete and total shock," said Megan. "I call it an unlucky lightning bolt."

As Megan exited the doctor's office that day, two Roswell Park employees from the Western New York Breast Resource Center greeted her. They gave her their support, offered their help and told her to call anytime if she had any questions.

"I remember feeling like I had an ally. I knew it was still going to be hard, but it was so important to know there were other people at Roswell Park, in addition to the doctors, who were there to support me," she said.

Megan underwent surgery, chemotherapy and radiation, and over the course of her treatment, she made numerous stops in the Breast Resource Center, which is 100 percent funded by donations.

"They were huge in helping me understand everything, and it made me feel like I wasn't alone," she said. "They helped me find where I was supposed to go for my genetics testing, they gave me scarves when I was going through chemo, and they even visited my family when I was in surgery."

The Breast Resource Center also introduced Megan to a support group called the Bosom Buddies. There, she was able to find other women who had dealt with similar battles and could relate to her ups and downs.



Megan Colosimo talks with Breast Resource Center staff member Jennifer McCabe during a recent visit to Roswell Park.

Eight months after her diagnosis, Megan finished her treatment. Two weeks later, her boyfriend, Domonic, proposed, and now, Megan and her husband have a 1-year-old son named Dante.

"I wasn't sure if I would be able to get pregnant because of the treatment I received, and when I did, the Breast Resource Center was one of my first stops. I couldn't wait to tell them," she said.

Megan has been in remission for six years now, and every October, she takes part in the Bosom Buddies Walk. The event is a fundraiser that provides support for the Breast Resource Center — so it can continue its important work in helping more patients like Megan.

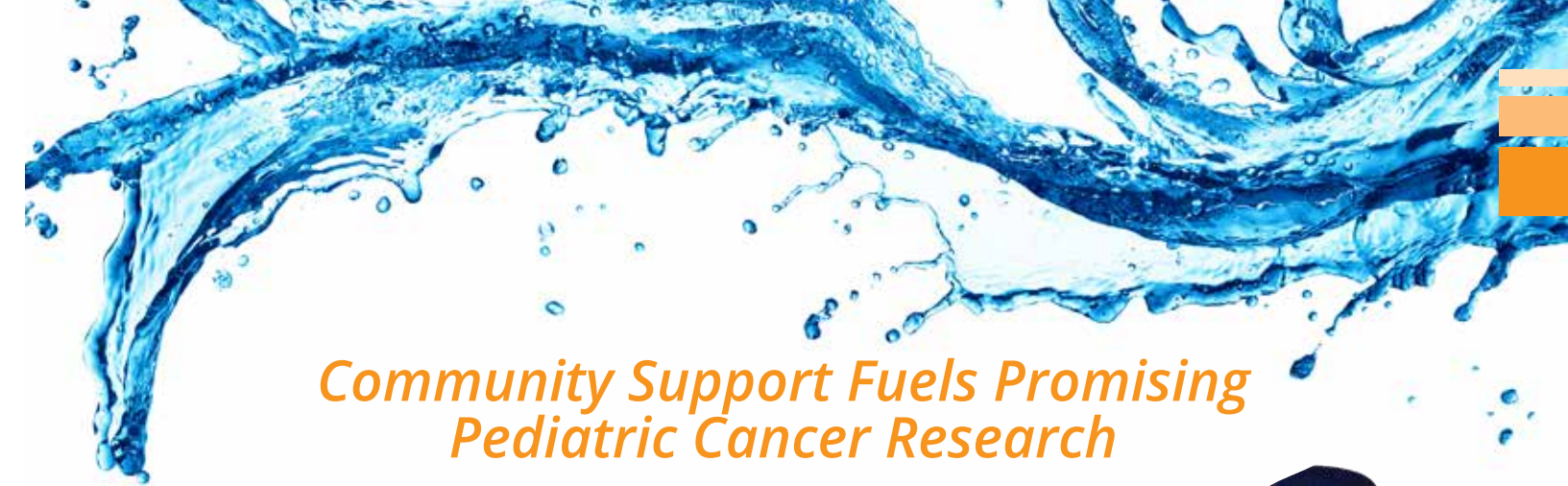
"I really do feel like Roswell Park place gave me my life. They allowed me to marry my husband and have my son," said Megan. "And the Breast Resource Center was one of the most important parts of that."



Participants in the Bosom Buddies Walk raise funds to support the Breast Resource Center and breast cancer research at Roswell Park.

The Western New York Breast Resource Center, which is 100 percent funded by donations, is free and open to the public, and offers reliable, current breast cancer information for patients and their caregivers.

- A lending library of print and video resources
- Chemotherapy clinic tours
- Free wigs, scarves and hats for patients on chemotherapy, and referrals to the Look Good Feel Better makeover programs, sponsored by the American Cancer Society
- Information on local breast cancer support groups, financial assistance programs and transportation
- Information on breast cancer risk and prevention programs



Community Support Fuels Promising Pediatric Cancer Research

Jedidah Woomer was a son to two loving and proud parents. He was a brother. A swimmer. A successful student.

During high school, Jed was the co-captain of his Tonawanda High School swim team. He was always encouraging his teammates to push it to the limit — and to give both swimming and life everything they had.

Outside of school, he was a decorated Eagle Scout who earned his ranking through service projects by giving back to his local community.

Shortly after his high school graduation, when Jed was embarking on a fun, relaxing summer and starting to think about a career in engineering, Jed was diagnosed with a very rare form of soft tissue cancer called synovial sarcoma.

After Jed's diagnosis, his community rallied behind him and joined in his fight against cancer, starting a "Red for Jed" awareness campaign. With that support, Jed and his family faced a challenging cancer journey with optimism and courage.

Sadly, a few days after he underwent surgery to remove a tumor in his chest, Jed passed away at the young age of 19.

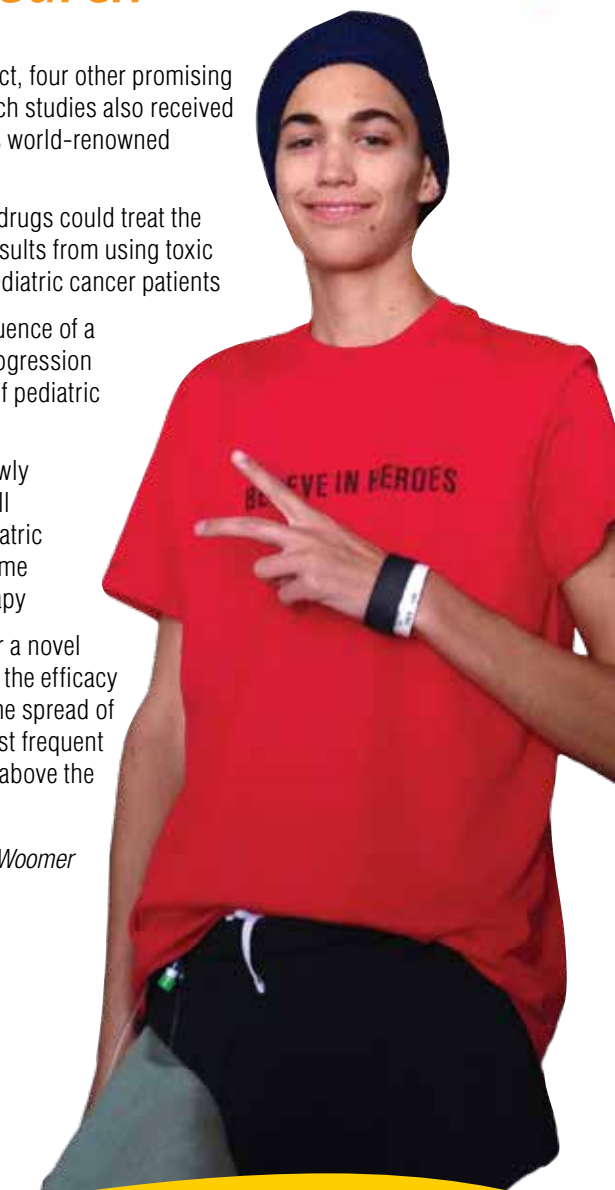
The way that Jed lived his life is continuing to inspire his friends and family. In August, Jed's alumni swim team, classmates and community members took part in Carly's Crossing, an open-water swim event, to help raise money for Roswell Park in memory of Jed.

The funds raised by Carly's Crossing, as well as donations and other fundraising events, benefit Carly's Club, which supports cutting-edge pediatric cancer research and offers support programs for children with cancer. And recently, Carly's Club funded a new research project aimed at bettering our understanding of synovial sarcoma — the same type of cancer Jed battled. As part of this initiative, researchers will work to identify genetic mutations that could be targeted with more effective treatments for this rare type of cancer, so that fewer families have to deal with the devastating disease.

In addition to that project, four other promising pediatric cancer research studies also received funding. Roswell Park's world-renowned researchers are now:

- Testing whether two drugs could treat the harmful damage that results from using toxic cancer treatments in pediatric cancer patients
- Investigating the influence of a specific gene on the progression of an aggressive form of pediatric muscle cancer
- Testing whether a newly identified drug could kill lymphoma cells in pediatric patients that have become resistant to chemotherapy
- Investigating whether a novel compound could boost the efficacy of a vaccine to inhibit the spread of neuroblastoma, the most frequent solid tumor in children above the age of 1

Jedidah Woomer



"It is thanks to our supporters — like Jed's family and friends — that we are able to take these cutting-edge ideas and start putting them into action," said Andrei Gudkov, Ph.D., DSci, Senior Vice President of Basic Science, who received one of the research grants.

Celebrating 20 Years of The Ride For Roswell and the Difference it Has Made

Twenty years ago, Maria Frisina was checking out at a grocery store when she saw a brochure for a brand new event: The Ride For Roswell.

"I was grieving the loss of my grandma, who was my best friend, at the time," Maria said. "She had passed away from ovarian cancer."

Although Maria hadn't rode a bike since she was little, she wanted to take part in The Ride to honor the memory of her grandma. So she bought a bike, signed up for The Ride and rode nine miles that first year.

And she's come back to The Ride every year since.

"Who would have thought that 20 years later, I would still be riding!" Maria said. "I'm committed because of the deep love and bond I had with my grandma. I want to help in any way I can to end the pain and suffering that cancer causes everyone."

It's evident that Maria is not the only one who feels that way. Over the past 20 years, tens of thousands of riders and volunteers have participated in The Ride to raise critically needed funds and honor their loved ones.

"It's more than just a bike ride — it's the emotion of The Ride: the hugs, the camaraderie, the tears," said Cindy Eller, Executive Director, Roswell Park Alliance Foundation. "It's seeing someone come back, year after year, and crying with the families whose loved one isn't there this year."

In June, The Ride celebrated its 20th anniversary, and 8,000 riders raised a record-setting \$4.6 million. Over the past 20 years, riders, donors and volunteers have helped raise more than \$34 million for Roswell Park.

But those stats are more than just numbers — they represent the many cancer patients whose lives have been touched by The Ride.

The funds raised have helped provide quality-of-life programs for patients and their families to make their cancer journeys just a little bit more manageable. Because of events like The Ride, patients have emotional and spiritual support through services like pastoral care and counseling. They also are able to receive wigs free-of-charge during treatment, have access to the arts and visit with pet therapy dogs — all because of donations.

And just as importantly, The Ride has allowed Roswell Park's world-renowned scientists to advance their cutting-edge research so that more lives can be saved.

Every year, about 20 new, preliminary research projects at Roswell Park get off the ground thanks to the money that is raised by The Ride and other events. By riding, donating, or volunteering, community members are literally helping to propel researchers' ideas forward.

"Because of The Ride's success over the past 20 years, Roswell Park has made great headway in many areas of cancer research, including personalized medicine, cancer vaccines and immunotherapy. The funds that our participants raised this year will allow us to make even more progress," said Candace Johnson, PhD, RPCI President and CEO, Wallace Family Chair of Translational Research. "We are so grateful for the support from the community which has allowed The Ride to be so successful and the important work at Roswell Park to continue."



Maria Frisina is one of a few participants who has taken part in The Ride For Roswell every year since 1996.

Hear from the Scientists on How The Ride Has Helped

Thanks to Ride For Roswell participants, I recently received funding for a new research project. These research grants are awarded after an internal, peer-reviewed competition, and only the most promising early-stage projects receive funding. My study will focus on molecular changes that may cause lung cancer patients to not respond to cancer treatment. Long-term, we hope to find ways to correct or compensate for those changes so that more lives can be saved.

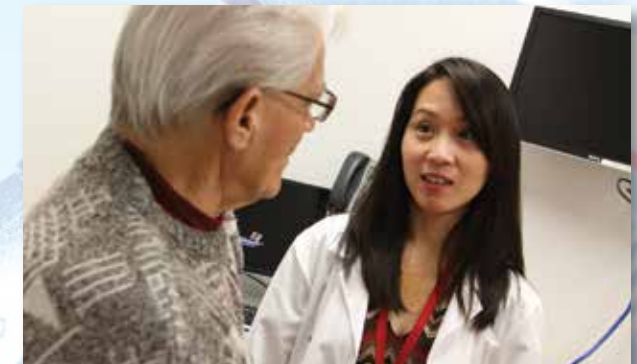
- Grace Dy, MD, Associate Professor of Oncology

My research was only able to advance because of fundraising events like The Ride For Roswell. Now, because of that early support, I've received a number of prestigious grants to help bring new immune therapies to patients with ovarian cancer, a disease that is often very hard to treat. We recently focused on taking stem cells from patient's blood, re-engineering them and infusing them back into the patients. These reprogrammed cells then become a continuous, potentially lifesaving source of cancer-fighting immune cells. This strategy has proven successful in preclinical studies as a way to eradicate existing cancer and to prevent new cancer cells from developing.

- Kunle Odunsi, MD, PhD, Roswell Park Deputy Director

Funds raised by The Ride For Roswell are helping patients who are in need of financial assistance pay for a potentially life-saving test, OmniSeq Target™. Roswell Park is now offering this state-of-the-art genetic test to treat patients with advanced lung cancer and metastatic melanoma. The test analyzes a patient's tumor DNA, specifically looking at 23 cancer-associated genes that are directly related to new and better therapies called targeted therapies. Our physicians can then customize a patient's therapy based on their tumor's unique, genetic profile. These targeted drugs are more effective and have less side effects than traditional chemotherapy and radiation. Thank you for being a Ride For Roswell supporter and helping these patients!

- Carl Morrison, MD, DVM, Executive Director of the Center for Personalized Medicine



Ride For Roswell participants often ride in honor or in memory of their loved ones who have been affected by cancer.



This photo from the archives shows riders getting ready at the first Ride For Roswell in 1996.



Ride For Roswell participants ride to raise funds for cutting-edge cancer research and compassionate patient-care programs at Roswell Park.



I cannot envision going anywhere else for treatment than Roswell Park.

-Charlie Donner, lymphoma survivor

"Finding out you have cancer is a frightening moment. However, coming to Roswell Park for treatment provides a calming environment. Applying latest techniques and advancements in treating cancer, Roswell Park's medical team couples professionalism with a genuine caring concern for you as a patient. Roswell Park is truly a place of renewed hope!"

In Eva's Words: *How Donations Saved My Husband's Life*

By Eva LaForty

Four years ago, my husband, Jason, began having headaches. We were very busy with our four children, and at first, we thought the headaches were caused by stress, and we joked about them being caused by our youngest's "terrible twos."

But the headaches began to get worse, so one day, we made the decision to go to the emergency room. The doctors in the ER performed tests, and when they came back, they said three of the worst words I've ever heard: "we found something."

Not long after that, Jason was diagnosed with stage 4 glioblastoma — brain cancer. And one of the worst, most aggressive kinds.

Jason was only 37. We were healthy and active, and, despite the headaches, it felt like cancer had come out of nowhere. Of course, I immediately thought of our children.

Would he be able to see them grow up? Were we even going to make it through another couple of months? It felt like our lives just stopped right in front of us.

Jason's doctor recommended that we travel four hours to Roswell Park to decide on his course of treatment. Once we were there, we decided to do surgery, chemotherapy and radiation. We had to stay at Roswell Park during the week, and we drove home on the weekend to see the kids. It was hard being away and it was stressful for the kids, but I knew that if we didn't make that decision, they would lose their father.

During Jason's treatment, he had an allergic reaction to the chemotherapy, and he had to stop receiving it. Not long after that, the doctors found another tumor. The cancer was back. I knew the statistics: that this form of recurrent brain cancer meant that Jason was expected to live for only months.

We tried our best to remain optimistic, and Jason underwent another surgery. But after the operation, Jason couldn't go back on the same chemotherapy drug because of his allergic reaction. It felt like we were out of options, and I was so discouraged.

Then, Jason's doctor, Dr. Robert Fenstermaker, told us about a clinical trial that was available. He and his team had received funding from donations to develop a cancer vaccine, and he asked if Jason wanted to go on the clinical trial to help test the drug.

We knew there was a chance it wouldn't work, but we felt like we had nothing to lose. The news from Jason's doctor gave us a little bit of hope, and we knew that even if the vaccine didn't help Jason, we could be part of something that could help people down the road.

Now, Jason has been on the clinical trial for three years, and as I write this today, he has no evidence of cancer. He's playing ball with the kids, going fishing with them, taking them to the drive-in and helping our oldest, Stephanie, start

high school. We are just enjoying our lives and taking the time to appreciate what we have.

Him still being here for our children and for me means the world to me. I cannot describe in words what this vaccine has done for us. It has saved someone's life.



Eva LaForty and her husband, Jason, a brain cancer survivor, enjoy a day at the park with their four children.



Robert Fenstermaker, MD, and Michael Ciesielski, PhD, were only able to develop the **SurVaxM vaccine** that Jason is receiving because of funding made available by donations and fundraising events.

The first-of-its-kind cancer vaccine works by generating an immune response to target survivin, a protein that helps cancer cells survive under stressful conditions.

The vaccine showed promise in treating brain cancer during a recent phase I clinical trial. In collaboration with the Cleveland Clinic, **SurVaxM** will now be evaluated in a larger phase II clinical trial for advanced brain tumors. The study at Roswell Park will be funded 100 percent by donations. The vaccine will also be tested in a new phase I clinical trial for multiple myeloma patients.



Robert Fenstermaker, MD

THANK YOU RUSS SALVATORE



Russell Salvatore Provides Free TV Services for Patients and Families

"Be my guest, and let us do the rest!"

That familiar invitation from restaurateur Russell Salvatore, heard in TV ads for Russell's Steaks, Chops & More, has taken on new meaning for inpatients at Roswell Park Cancer Institute. Patients will no longer pay for TV access during a hospital stay, thanks to a generous \$400,000 donation to Roswell Park from Mr. Salvatore.

Previously, Roswell Park inpatients paid for TV service. Kara Eaton-Weaver, Executive Director, Patient/Family Experience, said RPCI "is incredibly grateful to Russell Salvatore for this donation. This gift provides patients with a much-needed distraction and helps relieve the financial burden they are already carrying as they undergo cancer treatment."

"Patients at Roswell Park are dealing with enough by battling this terrible disease," says Mr. Salvatore. "I feel fortunate that I am able to help them in some way, and I hope this gift will give them one less thing they have to think about."

Among many other community contributions, Mr. Salvatore has supported Roswell Park in numerous other ways and has been a loyal donor for 16 years. He has supported All Star Night, Roswell Park's signature black tie

gala, The Ride For Roswell and Herd About Buffalo, a public art project that supports Roswell Park.

Mr. Salvatore grew up in Buffalo and got started in his career by working in a restaurant owned by his parents, who came to the United States from Italy. He later purchased and ran a hot dog stand before founding Salvatore's Italian Gardens, Russell's, and Salvatore's Grand Hotel on Transit Road in Lancaster.

Mr. Salvatore announced his donation at an event at Roswell Park in August. During the event, Mr. Salvatore tore up a mockup of a patient's TV bill — a bill that patients will no longer be receiving, thanks to his generous donation. Attendees also watched a warm and welcoming video message from Mr. Salvatore that patients and families will see when they turn on the TVs in their hospital rooms.

"We put a tremendous value on quality of life here at Roswell Park," says Roswell Park President and CEO Candace Johnson, PhD. "This gift will give our patients comfort and allow them to feel a little more at home."



At the announcement of the donation, Dr. Johnson presented a white lab coat to Mr. Salvatore with a title of "Chief of Television Services." From left to right: Lee Wortham, Chair, Roswell Park Alliance Foundation, Roswell Park patient Lavon Amos, Mr. Salvatore and Dr. Johnson.



A warm and welcoming video message from Mr. Salvatore will play when patients turn on the TVs in their hospital rooms.

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During Porsche's recent visit, she walked around with her owner, Sherry – who was inspired to start giving back after her family members' own battles with cancer – as well as a Roswell Park volunteer Jim Hickey.

Jim recounted one of his favorite memories from his trips around the hospital.

Jim, Pepper and her owner were making their way around Roswell Park one day when Pepper, in what seemed to be a purposeful manner walked over to a woman in a waiting area and put her head in the woman's lap.

Jim began to apologize, but stopped mid-sentence when he saw the woman's face.

"She just lit up," Jim said. "She told us she was at Roswell Park with her father, who was facing a tough battle, and she was worried and upset. It was like Pepper knew that she needed comforting. The woman said to us, 'you don't know how much that helped.' That is one experience I will never forget."

“ I was diagnosed with leukemia while visiting Florida with my husband, and I was told that I needed to get to a cancer institute right away. The first words out of our mouths were, ‘We need to go back to Buffalo. We need to go to Roswell Park.’ Once I was there, I felt more at peace, and I knew I was in good hands. My doctor told me, ‘You give me one year, and I’ll give you 40.’ Now, three years later, I am doing well – and it’s all thanks to Roswell Park. ”



Marcia Haas, leukemia survivor