BORN TO BEAT CANCER
Melanoma is no match for young survivor
Diane Barber receives MD Anderson’s highest nursing honor

Arceneaux Award honors outstanding clinical research oncology nurse

By Miriam Smith

“Our patients are willing to leave their homes, jobs and families to participate in our clinical trials. Their courage, spirit and hope constantly inspire me.”

—DIANE BARBER, Ph.D.

Diane Barber, Ph.D., is the recipient of the 2014 Ethel Fleming Arceneaux Outstanding Nurse-Oncologist Award. The Brown Foundation, Inc. established the award in 1982.

Barber, who works in Investigational Cancer Therapeutics, Phase I Clinical Trials Program, received a cash award of $15,000, a crystal plaque and a commemorative pin at a June ceremony led by Ron DePinho, M.D., president of MD Anderson.

“Diane makes an extraordinary impact on the lives of our patients and their loved ones, and she enriches the lives of her friends and colleagues,” DePinho says.

Earlier in the month, co-workers, friends and members of the selection committee surprised Barber with the news. Hardly able to catch her breath, she accepted a plaque and a bouquet of flowers amidst an uproar of applause.

“That is the proudest moment of my career,” says Barber, a nurse for 26 years. “Never in my wildest dreams would I have thought I’d be nominated, let alone be a finalist. And to win — I just keep thinking I’m in a dream and need to wake up.”

Barber came to MD Anderson in 1998 and joined Investigational Cancer Therapeutics in 2009. She developed an interest in nursing when she was 10.

“In the late 1960s, there was a TV program, ‘Julia,’ whose lead character was an African-American nurse,” she says. “It was the most awesome thing at that time because I didn’t have any health care role models in my family. My parents and grandparents didn’t finish high school.”

Barber says her Phase I clinical trial patients, many of whom have advanced stage cancer and haven’t responded to standard treatments, motivate her to give her all every day.

“Our patients are willing to leave their homes, jobs and families to participate in our clinical trials,” she says. “Their courage, spirit and hope constantly inspire me.”

Aside from winning the Arceneaux Award, Barber says her greatest accomplishment is earning her doctorate of philosophy in nursing. She achieved this lifelong dream in 2012 while working full time.

Barber, who already teaches nursing part-time, plans to become a full-time professor when she retires from nursing. She feels it’s part of her purpose to help educate the next generation.

The Brown Foundation encourages Arceneaux Award winners to use the prize money to indulge themselves and take a break from the selflessness their profession requires. Barber plans to treat herself to a blue Coach bag she’s been eyeing for years and then will embark on a vacation with her husband.

Video: www.youtube.com/mygivingtomdanderson

American Society of Clinical Oncology recognizes MD Anderson’s extraordinary contributions to cancer care

By Will Fitzgerald

Cancer research and treatment have evolved significantly in the past five decades. As the American Society of Clinical Oncology (ASCO) celebrates its 50th anniversary, the organization has named former MD Anderson President John Mendelsohn, M.D., Waun Ki Hong, M.D., and Gabriel Hortobagyi, M.D. to its list of luminaries.

Mendelsohn served as president of MD Anderson from 1996 to 2011. He now co-directs the Sheikh Khalifa Bin Zayed Al Nahyan Institute for Personalized Cancer Therapy. Mendelsohn is widely regarded for his transformative role in understanding how growth factors bind to the surface of cells and regulate their functions.

Hong leads MD Anderson’s Cancer Medicine division and is internationally recognized as the foremost authority on treating and preventing head and neck and lung cancers. In his nearly four-decade career, his innovative research led to seminal contributions in chemoprevention, larynx preservation and personalized therapy in lung cancer.

Hortobagyi, professor and former chair of Breast Medical Oncology, has made major advances in treating breast cancer, including combination chemotherapies for inoperable tumors and multidisciplinary care for patients at all disease stages. He initiated a 1974 study that found presurgical chemotherapy could reduce the size of many tumors up to 50%.

Hong and Hortobagyi both plan to retire on Aug. 31.
Allison shares inaugural Tang Prize for his CANCER IMMUNOTHERAPY INNOVATION

By Scott Merville

The first Tang Prize for Biopharmaceutical Science has been awarded to Jim Allison, Ph.D., chair of Immunology at MD Anderson, and Tasuku Honjo, M.D., Ph.D., of Japan’s Kyoto University, for research leading to cancer immunotherapy.

Taiwanese entrepreneur Samuel Yin established the biennial Tang Prize in December 2012. The 2014 prizes provide a cash award of $1.3 million and a research grant of $333,835.

Allison launched an entirely new way to treat cancer by blocking molecules on immune system T cells that turn off immune response. The treatment, called immune checkpoint blockade, grew out of his basic science research to understand the biology of T cells — the immune system's customized attackers.

Allison is executive director of MD Anderson’s immunotherapy platform, which supports immunotherapy research across multiple cancer types, including the Moon Shots Program. The program was established in 2012 to dramatically accelerate the pace of converting scientific discoveries into clinical advances that reduce cancer deaths.

Allison also is deputy director of the David H. Koch Center for Applied Research of Genitourinary Cancers and holds the Vivian L. Smith Distinguished Chair in Immunology at MD Anderson.

Notable AAAS award goes to MD Anderson researcher

By Ron Gilmore

Li Ma, Ph.D., an assistant professor in Experimental Radiation Oncology, is co-winner of the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) Martin and Rose Wachter Cancer Research Award.

She shares the award with Jeffrey Tyner, Ph.D., assistant professor at Oregon Health & Science University. Ma’s lab investigates novel determinants of tumor invasion, metastasis and therapeutic targets in breast cancer. Ma’s research focuses on understanding how to regulate breast cancer metastasis, breast tumor radioresistance, and key breast cancer proteins and pathways to develop treatments.

The annual Wachter Award honors early career investigators. They each receive $25,000 and deliver a public lecture on their research. Their award entry essays are published in the journal Science Translational Medicine.

The past year has been a whirlwind of honors and awards for Allison, including:

• 2013 Science Breakthrough of the Year
• American Association for Cancer Research – Cancer Research Institute Lloyd J. Old Award in Cancer Immunology
• The Economist’s 2013 Innovation Award for Bioscience
• Breakthrough Prize in Life Sciences
• Elected a fellow of the American Association for Cancer Research Academy

At MD Anderson, we pride ourselves on three core values: caring, integrity and discovery. These simple words sum up the commitment and compassion behind our mission areas of research, patient care, prevention and education. These are not mere buzzwords — they permeate our collective consciousness toward one common goal: end cancer.

We’re grateful for the dedicated donors who also share these core values. Your courage and generosity are reflected throughout Promise. By believing in MD Anderson and giving so selflessly, you embody the spirit of caring and integrity upon which we were founded.

What’s more, your philanthropic support enables us to build on our world-class research strengths and forge new paths of discovery that will directly benefit cancer patients and their families, now and for generations to come.

At every level across this institution, we embrace the importance of caring, integrity and discovery. It’s what distinguishes MD Anderson as the world’s premier cancer center. We’re indebted to you for your continued support.

Donors really do make a difference — by sustaining and often launching novel research projects, accelerating big data initiatives, funding vital educational programs, enhancing prevention and risk management efforts, extending our national and global reach, and more. Most important, you make life better for our patients, whose courage inspires us and whose gratitude drives everything we do. Thank you for joining us in Making Cancer History®.
Survivors Say

Paula Schuetz of Pearland, a Houston suburb, is the mother of three children (ages 24, 19 and 16). She enjoys photography, gardening and crafting. Her mantra as a caregiver, cancer patient and survivor: Never, never, never give up!

It was 2003, and our family was relocating to a different town so we were house hunting on weekends with our three children. My husband started having horrible headaches, low energy and dizziness. A CT scan revealed a tumor in his brain.

It was stage IV medulloblastoma, and the prognosis wasn’t good. We went directly to MD Anderson and learned that the disease had spread to his bones.

We stayed in Houston to be treated by Dr. Charles Conrad. He was very aggressive with treatment. We had a whole year with my husband before he passed, a year we probably wouldn’t have had at any other hospital.

I found a job in a medical imaging facility, greeting and registering patients. It made me feel that I was making a difference in the lives of patients. A smile and a kind word seemed to help them, and me.

Fast-forward to 2010. I was having a bit of bloating, which I chalked up to weight gain. When I started having other symptoms, I knew there was something else going on. I had a family history of fibroids, so I demanded an ultrasound. My abdomen was full of tumors.

A CT scan revealed more and after biopsy, I was diagnosed with stage IIIC ovarian cancer. I was floored. How could this be? I refused to leave my children parentless so, again, I was at MD Anderson — this time, for me.

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My team at MD Anderson has seen me go into remission for three years, then for four months and now, soon I’ll be in remission again. Living with chronic ovarian cancer hasn’t been easy, but I have so much to live for.

My children give me the strength to fight, and MD Anderson gives me the power. I’m very blessed.

Promise invites cancer survivors to share their reflections. Email Promise@mdanderson.org.

PUTTING CANCER RESEARCH ON THE FAST TRACK

By Wendy Mohon

Sid and Dawna Mauldin of Pampa, Texas, wanted to show their MD Anderson support. Since the couple happens to own a NASCAR Camping World Truck, what better way to do this than by emblazoning its logo on the hood?

The story of what brought them to the institution in the first place is not as cut and dried. In February 2013, Sid was diagnosed with stage IV gastric cancer. The cancer had metastasized to his liver and lungs.

The Mauldins own a ranch and SWM International Inc., a company that manufactures parts for the oil and gas drilling industry, as well as NASCAR parts. As a rancher and businessman, Sid initially was reluctant to talk about his disease with his NASCAR friends and business associates. But more than a year later, he speaks openly about his cancer and his treatment. In fact, he wants to tell everyone about his MD Anderson experience.

“I think MD Anderson is on to the cure, and I’m going to do everything I can to get us there,” he says.

Spreading the word

“One reason we wanted the logo on our hood is that we want everyone to know about MD Anderson,” Sid says.

Joe Nemechek and his son, John Hunter Nemechek, are the drivers of the Mauldins’ NASCAR Camping World Truck #8. Joe told the Pampa News in a recent article that “having MD Anderson involved is a very kind gesture from Sid and Dawna. It’s amazing the technology involved and how they’re taking care of Sid. It is great to bring awareness to their facilities.”

In March of this year, the Mauldins committed $100,000 to support research led by Sid’s doctor, David Hong, M.D., associate professor in Investigational Cancer Therapeutics (see page 9).

“Feeling darned good”

Sid is responding well to hepatic infusion chemotherapy, and Hong hopes to find an appropriate immunotherapy trial for him soon. “Currently, metastatic cancer isn’t curable, but I’ll do my best to keep him alive as long as possible,” Hong says.

As for Sid, he believes the good wishes of all his NASCAR friends must be helping.

“I think the prayers from all over the U.S. may not have cured me, but they’ve got me feeling darned good,” he says.

FAST FACTS

Who’s seeing MD Anderson’s logo?

The NASCAR Camping World Truck Series averaged 805,000 viewers tuned in per event in 2013.

Viewers over the age of 35 make up 91% of the overall audience.
Marit Liv Peterson may be genetically predisposed to melanoma, but the disease was no match for the 10-year-old and her team.

She was 4 years old when her mother, Candy Peterson, explained her own breast cancer diagnosis. Marit’s upbeat reaction: “We match, Mommy!” melted Candy’s heart and reminded her of Marit’s courageous spirit that saw her through tough times in early childhood.

Marit, of Dallas, was born with a small bump on her finger. Pediatricians dismissed it as nothing, but it started to resemble a melanoma lesion Marit’s grandfather had. Candy followed her motherly instincts and insisted on a biopsy. The results were inconclusive, and doctors recommended a visit to MD Anderson.

Soon the Petersons met Jeffrey Lee, M.D., chair of Surgical Oncology, who’s become like family to them. Lee diagnosed Marit with stage IIIB metastatic melanoma and started treatment immediately. After surgery and a year of Interferon injections, Marit, then 2, was deemed a survivor.

“I love Dr. Lee. He saved my life,” Marit says. “He took all of my cancer away, and he’s looking for clues to take the cancer away for everybody.”

Overcome with gratitude and determined to contribute to the fight, the Petersons decided to support Lee’s research into the inherited genome for melanoma. They founded the Marit Peterson Fund for Melanoma Research and started a benefit golf tournament, which in eight years has raised more than $1 million. Lee and his staff attend the Richardson, Texas, tournament every year to provide skin cancer screenings.

“When melanoma gets cured someday, I’ll be really happy,” says Marit. “It’s important to help MD Anderson and Dr. Lee because it takes money to complete the research they need to make people better.”

The success only strengthens the Petersons’ commitment to the institution.

“All of the players on a football team can’t be exactly the same. You need the best people at every position, and that’s what MD Anderson has,” says Candy. “We had the surgeons, the dermatologists and the pediatric oncologists all working together for the win, which was getting our little girl back.”

The Petersons’ support has facilitated genetic testing on 1 million variations across the melanoma-causing part of the genome. Test results have identified several genes that may pose an increased risk for developing the disease.

Marit and Candy, who call themselves best friends, continue to “match.” Both are cancer-free: Candy for six years and Marit for eight.

Born to beat cancer

By Miriam Smith

Marit and Candy Peterson

The Melanoma Moon Shots builds upon Lee’s studies, made possible by the Petersons’ support, in a campaign to reduce deaths from melanoma and eventually to end the disease.

“When choosing a name for our first-born, we never could’ve imagined how poetic her middle name would be. ‘Liv’ means full of life, and that precisely describes our precious girl, Marit. When she had just gotten her results that she was cancer-free, I thought it’d be a good time to thank Dr. Lee and MD Anderson for saving Marit’s life. The fund we created is managed by Dr. Lee and supports the largest and highest-quality melanoma study of its kind. Thanks to the Melanoma Moon Shot, all of this work on the inherited genome for melanoma is going to become a part of something so much bigger. We couldn’t be more grateful.” — Candy Peterson

“Dr. Lee is very nice and smart, and he made me all better. That’s why I wanted to help him. Every single penny we raise goes to Dr. Lee’s research, and I hope he finds cures for all melanoma cancers. I go to MD Anderson every year to make sure my melanoma hasn’t come back. Kids from around the world come to MD Anderson too because it has the very best doctors. I’d tell anybody who has melanoma to come to MD Anderson because Dr. Lee saved my life.” — Marit Liv Peterson

What’s your moon shot? Contact us at Promise@mdanderson.org and tell us why MD Anderson’s Moon Shots Program is important to you.

MD ANDERSON’S MOON SHOTS PROGRAM

An unprecedented, comprehensive assault to significantly reduce deaths from cancer, the program comprises six teams of MD Anderson researchers and clinicians initially focusing on:

- Chronic lymphocytic leukemia
- Lung cancer
- Melanoma
- Myelodysplastic syndromes/ acute myeloid leukemia
- Prostate cancer
- Triple-negative breast and high-grade serous ovarian cancers

As of June 30, private philanthropic commitments to the program total more than $170.7 million.

www.cancermoonshots.org
THE POWER OF PHILANTHROPY

One person, one family, one foundation can change the future of cancer discovery

By Dawn Dorsey

What’s the power of a single gift? Just one thoughtful donation can propel innovation, speed discovery or provide kindling for a new idea.

Through their generosity to MD Anderson, these donors are examples of many who have a direct impact on a better, healthier future.

Discovering new hope

Many women with ovarian, uterine, cervical or other gynecological cancers face major surgery, lengthy hospitalization and recovery times, as well as high rates of complications, including infertility.

But, backed by a substantial gift from a grateful former patient, the Innovative Surgery team in Gynecologic Oncology is pioneering ways to give women better choices and brighter futures.

“Innovation and excellence are my passions,” the anonymous donor says. “This program exemplifies innovation. The surgeons’ persistently honed skills and teaching of those skills to others are evidence of their dedication to excellence.”

Developing new minimally invasive, conservative and fertility-sparing surgical techniques is the major goal of the program. The team also is dedicated to training the next generation of surgeons and conducting groundbreaking research.

The seven specialists are prolific investigators, with 16 prospective clinical trials and 30 retrospective trials among them. The gift also made it possible to use an advanced database to analyze current and historical patient outcomes.

“This gift has had a profound impact on clinical trials whose findings have changed patient care for all women with gynecologic cancers,” says Pedro Ramirez, M.D., professor in Gynecologic Oncology and Reproductive Medicine, who leads the team.

Faith in the future

Addi Bender was just a toddler when a rare, aggressive brain tumor claimed her life. But she lives on through pioneering research conducted on cells taken from her tumor. Addi’s Faith Foundation, which her parents established in 2008, helps fund the work of Vidya Gopalakrishnan, Ph.D., associate professor in Pediatrics. She’s developing a groundbreaking therapy for treating
childhood brain cancer. The promising strategy combines immunotherapy with drugs that remodel chromatin architecture, an approach that’s expected to boost effectiveness and minimize toxicity. The immunotherapy portion enters Phase I clinical trials soon; the drugs are being tested in animal models.

“It’s been important to have Addi’s cells to help us find possible answers, and the donations from Addi’s Faith Foundation help drive the innovative research,” Gopalakrishnan says.

The foundation’s main event is a 5k/10k run/walk and kids’ fun run, which in six years has grown to include more than 2,000 participants who raise more than $150,000 annually. The event grows every year and Addi’s mother, Amber, feels like it’s just the beginning.

“The best is yet to come,” she says. “We’re going to keep plugging away to be sure this research happens, and we’re not going to stop until there’s a cure.”

Visit addisfaithfoundation.org.

Preparing the next generation

Mistakes in judgment and decision-making are major contributors to medical errors. Yet physician education often is an unfunded mandate. The Howell B. Pennington Endowment Fund for mesothelioma and thoracic surgical oncology education, established in 2005 by Lisa K. LeBlanc in memory of her late husband, helps MD Anderson address this crucial need. The first gift dedicated to mesothelioma research and education at the institution, the fund has potential to enhance cancer care now and into the future.

“It was important to both of us to help discover ways that help more patients with this type of cancer, as well as assist their caregivers in understanding the disease and how best to support their loved ones,” she says.

The fund allows Ara Vaporciyan, M.D., professor in Thoracic and Cardiovascular Surgery, to expand educational programs on several levels, including financial support to interns, purchasing books and teaching tools, and simulation activities to provide important hands-on training.

“My work is focused on education as a solution to a major flaw in our health care system,” Vaporciyan says. “By training highly competent, safe and cost-effective surgeons, we can expand the impact MD Anderson makes to a much wider audience.”

Lasting effects

Each donor can — and does — make a difference in advancements happening daily at MD Anderson. Whether it’s to blaze new trails in research, explore novel treatments or provide essential training to up-and-coming experts, every gift is essential.

Visit: www.youtube.com/mygivingatmdanderson
Hope is in sight
Popp family raises funds for a rare and deadly eye cancer
By Miriam Smith

Ted Popp Jr. was diagnosed with cancer three years before his father. The difference: Popp Sr. was in total remission after 18 weeks of treatment at MD Anderson, while Popp Jr. continues to fight metastatic uveal melanoma, a rare type of eye cancer that isn’t preventable, curable or treatable.

While melanoma’s biggest risk factor is exposure to UV light, uveal melanoma doesn’t appear UV-related, although most diagnosed have lighter skin and eyes. More than 99% of funding for melanoma supports skin melanoma, and none of the treatments developed have had a significant effect on uveal melanoma.

“Funding for uveal melanoma is practically nonexistent,” says Popp Sr. “Ted Jr. was convinced increased funding could make a difference.”

The father-son team partnered with Scott Woodman, M.D., Ph.D., assistant professor in Melanoma Medical Oncology. Through a letter writing campaign and personal contributions, they’ve donated $235,000 to his research.

“I was under the impression that to do anything meaningful you had to have millions of dollars,” says Popp Jr. “I learned that you can do impactful research at lower levels of support, and we’re already seeing the difference it’s making.”

Despite the challenges facing those with metastatic uveal melanoma, there’s hope. It’s a “homogeneous” cancer, meaning mutations are similar. Homogeneous cancers are easier to treat because similar mechanisms drive tumors, so a therapy that intervenes has a widespread effect.

Popp Jr.’s life depends on the research his father is supporting. Although he’s in good health, he’s already survived three times longer than the average patient. The Popp family’s aid has led to the discovery of new potential therapeutic targets.

“Techniques that permit us to analyze small sample sizes help us better understand the molecular nature of metastatic uveal melanoma,” Woodman says. “I’m hopeful that we’ll make strides in controlling and eliminating the disease and providing therapies that delay or eliminate its emergence.”

Yet, Popp Jr.’s disease has metastasized.

“My son’s passionate about increasing awareness and funding to make a difference, even if it doesn’t benefit him,” says Popp Sr. “Hopefully in the near term there could be some miraculous discovery. You can always hope.”

Avon Foundation walks for a world without breast cancer
Grant ensures nurse navigators for underserved patients

By Miriam Smith

Funding from the Avon Walk for Breast Cancer set MD Anderson’s Breast Cancer Nurse Navigators program in motion in 2009 in response to disturbing data about disparities in breast cancer deaths. According to the Avon Foundation Forum, at that time black women in Houston were 45% more likely to die of breast cancer than white women. Today the program provides much needed services to Houston’s underserved breast cancer patients at Lyndon B. Johnson General Hospital (LBJ). Nurse navigators ensure patients have a constant source of information, education, support and encouragement all the way from pre-dagnosis through survivorship.

Support from the walk continues to strengthen the program, awarding it $100,000 at the seventh annual event in April. This money will help fund two nurse navigators for the coming year.

More than 1,000 participants, including 126 breast cancer survivors, walked 39.3 miles over the two-day event, sleeping in tents overnight. Together, they raised more than $2 million to support 10 Texas organizations, including MD Anderson, has served these patients for the past decade. She participated in the Avon Walk for the first time this year.

“It was very challenging but extremely rewarding,” she says. “The atmosphere of focus on a shared mission to cure cancer was apparent the whole weekend.”

Rieber is recruiting patients, survivors and caregivers to join her in next year’s Avon Walk.

“Avon has been extremely generous to our program, and we’re thrilled to continue this partnership,” she says.
Patients with metastatic colon cancer respond to new combination therapy

By Will Fitzgerald

In a Phase I clinical trial, MD Anderson researchers found patients with advanced colorectal cancer responded well to a combination therapy of the drugs vemurafenib, cetuximab and irinotecan. The study, presented at the American Society of Clinical Oncology’s 2014 Annual Meeting in Chicago, examines a specific mutation in the BRAF gene, which is present in 5 to 10% of colorectal cancer patients.

“What’s promising is that we’re seeing these high response rates in early studies, which suggests this could become a new standard of care down the line,” says David Hong, M.D., associate professor in Investigational Cancer Therapeutics and lead author of the study. “There’s clearly some kind of synergistic activity with the combination.”

Scott Kopetz, M.D., Ph.D., associate professor in Gastrointestinal Medical Oncology and senior author on the Phase I study, will lead a U.S. cooperative randomized Phase II trial of this combination in BRAF-mutated colorectal cancer. Hong and Kopetz both receive research financial support from Genentech.

By Ron Gilmore

How will a cancer patient fare with treatment? By mining readily available data from The Cancer Genome Atlas, scientists hope to answer this question by examining molecular information and traditional clinical variables such as age or tumor stage. Their goal is translating biological data into clinical use.

The Cancer Genome Atlas is supported by the National Cancer Institute and National Human Genome Research Institute within the National Institutes of Health (NIH) to look at genomic changes in more than 20 types of cancer. Han Liang, Ph.D., assistant professor in Bioinformatics and Computational Biology at MD Anderson, conducted a multi-institutional study of data from lung, ovarian, brain and kidney cancers. An article published online in the journal Nature Biotechnology reveals that molecular profiling, while still in its infancy, may eventually hold promise for cancer patient prognosis.

“By analyzing data from multiple cancer types, we could evaluate prognostic models and identify gene alterations that led to tumors,” says Liang.

The study was funded by the NIH, the National Cancer Institute-MD Anderson Cancer Center Uterine SPORE career development award, the George S. Hogan estate and the Lorraine Dell Program in Bioinformatics for Personalization of Cancer Medicine funded by the Michael & Susan Dell Foundation.

BIOLOGY TO BEDSIDE
Mining molecular data for cancer prognosis

By Ron Gilmore

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Study ties obesity to higher risk of breast cancer deaths

By Ron Gilmore

Scientists have long believed that obese women who developed estrogen-positive (ER+) breast cancer were at higher risk for death from the illness than lean women with the same diagnosis. A new MD Anderson study comparing obese mice with breast cancer and biological changes in breast cancer samples from patients now appears to indicate the tie.

“Our study reported direct evidence about the breast cancer-promoting impact of obesity and the biological functions and cellular signaling mechanisms involved in patients and laboratory experimental models.” —Mong-Hong Lee, Ph.D.

The researchers were able to show evidence for how obesity may cause some women to develop ER+ breast cancer more quickly and with more deadly results.

“We examined the impact of fat cells and the proteins secreted by them on breast cancer growth in human and mouse breast cancers,” says Mong-Hong Lee, Ph.D., professor in Molecular and Cellular Oncology and the principal investigator of the project’s basic science component. “Our study reported direct evidence about the breast cancer-promoting impact of obesity and the biological functions and cellular signaling mechanisms involved in patients and laboratory experimental models.”

An MD Anderson clinical trial based on this study is currently in progress.

The study was funded by the Susan G. Komen for the Cure Promise Grant; the National Cancer Institute at the National Institutes of Health; a Cancer Center Support Grant to MD Anderson; the Breast Cancer Research Foundation; the National Institutes of Health Loan Repayment Program, Minority Supplement and Training Grant Program in Molecular Genetics; the Vietnam Education Foundation; the Rosalie B. Hite Foundation; and the Department of Defense Breast Cancer Research Program.
Significantly surpassing all past years’ fundraising totals, the eighth annual A Conversation With a Living Legend® in Houston raised more than $1,031,000 for MD Anderson’s Moon Shots Program (see page 5). Proceeds will support the Prostate Cancer Moon Shot.

Condoleezza Rice, Ph.D., honoree of the May 21 event, spoke on domestic and international affairs in an interview with Brit Hume of Fox News Channel during a sold-out dinner program. More than 900 guests listened as the conversation delved into such topics as Russia’s President Vladimir Putin; the 2012 attack on the U.S. consulate in Benghazi, Libya; and Rice’s withdrawal as speaker at this year’s Rutgers University commencement ceremony.

Cyvia and Melvyn Wolff, a member of the MD Anderson Cancer Center Board of Visitors, were event chairs. Kelli Kickerillo and Todd Forester were co-chairs and will lead next year’s event. Honorary chairs were Vicky and Harris Pappas, who chaired the 2013 Living Legend event honoring Emmitt Smith.

Rice served as the 66th U.S. Secretary of State from 2005 to 2009. She was the second woman and first African-American woman to hold the post. Rice also was the first woman to hold the position of assistant to the president for national security affairs, under President George W. Bush from 2001 to 2005. She’s currently a professor of global business and economy at the Stanford Graduate School of Business and of political science at Stanford University.

Since 2007, A Conversation With a Living Legend® in Houston has raised approximately $3,528,000 for MD Anderson research and patient care initiatives.

A Conversation With a Living Legend® raises more than $1 million

Brit Hume leads interview with Condoleezza Rice

By Sarah Watson

MD Anderson served as an official sponsor of the May 2–4 Insperity Invitational golf tournament at The Woodlands Country Club Tournament Course. The Champion’s Tour event attracted thousands of spectators throughout the weekend as well as an impressive field of professional golfers including Fred Couples, Fred Funk and Ben Crenshaw.

MD Anderson activities throughout the week included:

• A donor and survivor hospitality event at pro golfer Steve Elkington’s Big Show RV on the 18th hole
• Two Pro-Am teams
• Skin cancer screenings for players and caddies
• Participation at the annual Player Dinner hosted by Arnold Palmer including skin cancer awareness tips from Carol Drucker, M.D., professor in Dermatology
• Two booths focused on sun safety and skin cancer prevention

MD Anderson volunteers gave attendees sunscreen packets, lip balm and branded umbrellas and stickers. The institution’s Strike Through Cancer Wall drew approximately 1,000 signatures and personal tributes from players, spectators, volunteers and cancer survivors eager to show their support of Making Cancer History®.

INSPERITY INVITATIONAL

A hole in one for cancer prevention awareness

By Sarah Watson

Golf legends Johnny Miller and Dave Stockton are among hundreds showing their support as they sign MD Anderson’s Strike Through Cancer Wall, displayed near the 18th green at the Insperity Invitational.

Video: www.youtube.com/mygivingtomdanderson

PHILANTHROPY IN ACTION

PHOTO BY PETE BAATZ

PHOTO BY PETE BAATZ

Brit Hume and Condoleezza Rice greet as their conversation begins at the Westin Galleria in Houston.

Brit Hume and Cyvia Wolff

Melvyn and Cyvia Wolff

Sharon Funk, wife of PGA golfer Fred Funk

From left, Jim Brown, cancer survivor; his wife, Linda; PGA golfer John Harris; and Judy McCullar, cancer survivor

2013 Insperity Invitational champion Esteban Toledo and wife Colleen
when life gives you lemons

Young ‘Sparkle Sisters’ share proceeds from cool drinks and cookies

By Miriam Smith

Anna Kate Cooper, a soon-to-be fifth-grader from Austin, raised $300 for cancer research over a 90-minute period at a cookie and lemonade stand. She partnered with two classmates from Doss Elementary. Together, the “Sparkle Sisters” spread word of the fundraiser through fliers and school-wide announcements.

“I want to help MD Anderson because my Uncle Randy and Aunt Mary Kathryn work there,” Anna Kate says. “We’re going to have more bake sales and lemonade stands so we can keep helping people with cancer.”

Randy Weber, M.D., chair of Head and Neck Surgery, and Mary Kathryn Cooper, executive director of special programs in the Development Office, welcomed Anna Kate and her father, Jonathan Cooper, to MD Anderson and proudly collected their niece’s $7 in quarters and $293 in cash.

“T’m so proud of Anna and her friends,” Mary Kathryn says. “Their innovation, creativity, enthusiasm and empathy are contagious, inspirational and truly mature. Their efforts warm my heart and are indicative of such imaginative and successful young ladies. They’ll make the world a better place.”

Team Propaganda earned the coveted silver trophy for the 28th annual tournament at the Musselman brothers’ Lazy 3 ranch in Albany, Texas. From left, Mason Primm, Paul Hobby, Brad Soherer and Shane Rice celebrate their champion status. Soherer, of West Palm Beach, Fla., was named the tournament’s most valuable player. Eleven hundred attendees ponied up more than $356,000 for this year’s event, which will support vital MD Anderson research and patient care initiatives.

Do you promise? Tell us why you’re committed to Making Cancer History® by sending an email to Promise@mdanderson.org.

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Jan Levit Silver

Jan Levit Silver, of Bellaire, Texas, is an executive vice president for Grocers Supply Co. Inc. Jan has been an MD Anderson patient and serves as an associate member of the MD Anderson Cancer Center Board of Visitors (BOV). Jan’s late father, Milton Levit, was a BOV member, and her uncle, Max Levit, is a senior BOV member. Generous donations from the Levit family support the Joe and Dora Levit MRI Center and the Levit Family Learning Center at MD Anderson.

Thirteen years ago, I came to MD Anderson for a second opinion for what appeared to be a benign cyst on my right breast. Our family friend, Dr. Sid Wallace, a respected radiologist at MD Anderson at the time, had encouraged me to repeat the mammogram and ultrasounds with the institution’s powerfully accurate machines, expert technicians and world-renowned radiologists.

It became quickly evident that the cyst was not benign. I was sent from the ultrasound to the MRI center. When I went into the waiting room, I saw the silver letters “Joe and Dora Levit MRI Center” and felt a flood of relief and comfort, knowing that I was going to be fine. While I knew our family, spearheaded by my father and uncle, Milton and Max Levit, had recently donated funds for the MRI center in honor of my grandparents, we had not yet visited. It still amazes me that I was one of the first beneficiaries of the MRI center bearing my grandparents’ names. I’m extremely grateful for the early and accurate detection and for the successful treatment and wonderful care I received.

That year, I arranged for the MD Anderson mammography van to come to our family company, Grocers Supply. We now have three vans visit every year because of high participation rates. Thanks to this screening, a number of our employees have received further evaluation and successful treatment due to early detection at MD Anderson, just as I had.

It’s amazing how much impact one small act of generosity can have, and how it can happen as close as your own back yard.

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Please check the appropriate box and return to the address above.

❑ Please change my name or address.
❑ I received a duplicate copy. Please make the necessary correction.
❑ Please remove my name from the Promise mailing list.
❑ I’d rather receive Promise via email.

My email address: ____________________________

UPCOMING EVENTS

Comments? Suggestions?
We welcome your perspective.
Email us your thoughts: Promise@mdanderson.org.

OCT.
29-30 MD Anderson Cancer Center
Board of Visitors Annual Meeting
Houston

NOV.
3 A Conversation With a Living Legend®
honoring Ben Crenshaw
Dallas

10 A Conversation With a Living Legend®
honoring Mack Brown
and R.C. Slocum
San Antonio

DEC.
4 Santa’s Elves Party
Houston

ACCESS ANSWERS
To become a patient: Call 877-632-6789 or fill out the self-referral form at www.mdanderson.org.