Evolving technologies
Philanthropy boosts new telesurgery program

From hay field to polo field

CHUKKERS FOR CHARITY

SUMMER 2012
A publication for friends of MD Anderson
A LEAP INTO THE FUTURE WITH TELEMEDICINE

AT&T’s $1 million contribution seeds new telesurgery program

By Lindsey Garner

Cancer can be a waiting game.

After diagnosis, patients wait to take a litany of tests, wait for the results and wait for physician referrals to explore their treatment options. To add to the frustration, cancer patients often travel great distances to receive their treatments.

Waiting is especially common for patients in rural and underserved communities, where access to treatment techniques such as minimally invasive surgery is rare.

Thanks to telemedicine, however, long waits don’t always have to be the case.

Connection to care

A recent $1 million contribution from AT&T will help close the distance between patients in rural, underserved areas and MD Anderson’s surgical oncology experts. The philanthropic contribution will fund technologies for a new telesurgery program at MD Anderson — one of the first in the nation. “AT&T’s laser focus on innovation, coupled with collaboration with the best minds, leads to solutions that help better the lives of others,” says Alice Aanstoos, regional vice president for external affairs, AT&T Texas. “We’re proud to help MD Anderson’s talented professionals as they continue expanding the reach of their healing hands through state-of-the-art broadband and communications technologies.”

The program will serve as a platform to extend MD Anderson’s specialized surgical expertise beyond Houston, build new collaborations and develop mentoring programs that advance cancer surgery. Physicians will leverage telemedicine technologies, including advanced wireless communication technology and cameras that connect to robotic, minimally invasive surgical instruments.
“Telemedicine can link patients with urban-area facilities that offer cutting-edge specialties and techniques,” says Chris Holsinger, M.D., associate professor of head and neck surgery.

Physicians will have opportunities to remotely consult on cases and evaluate whether patients are suitable for particular treatments unavailable in their communities, enhancing their access to care.

**The best and the brightest**

In March, the next generation of health care leaders had the opportunity to witness the future of telemedicine in action: telesurgery.

Through the AT&T/Junior Achievement Worldwide Job Shadow Initiative, 30 students from Houston’s DeBakey High School for Health Professionals and The Woodlands High School visited MD Anderson to learn about its new telesurgery program funded by AT&T. They also had the opportunity to tour departments and speak with resident physicians.

Students watched a live telesurgery demonstration involving a remote site in California. Holsinger described the procedure as “Playstation or Xbox Kinect meets ‘Grey’s Anatomy’.”

MD Anderson faculty and leadership also spoke to the students about their work, the education that prepared them for their careers and the future of medicine.

“High school was the seed for me to ultimately become a physician,” says Ronald DePinho, M.D., president of MD Anderson. He encouraged the students to “work hard, focus and embrace knowledge.”

On department tours, students learned firsthand the job skills they need to succeed in various health care professions.

In the Head and Neck Center, students learned about making facial prosthetics. Anaplastologist Patti Montgomery showed them how a prosthesis, unique to each patient, is created just like a “piece of art.”

Ivy Robinson, clinical supervisor of radiation therapy in the Department of Radiation Oncology-Therapy, taught students the importance of patient care skills in addition to technical skills and training. She reminded them that “patients look to you to give them hope.”

With AT&T’s support, the telesurgery program and students have the potential to shape a critical part of the future of oncology at MD Anderson and beyond.

**Building for the future**

Led by Holsinger and Robert Satcher, M.D., Ph.D., assistant professor of orthopedic oncology, the telesurgery program will roll out in three phases during the next four years. Phase one will involve pre-operative consultations between surgeons at the institution’s main campus and those at its Katy and Sugar Land regional care centers. This pilot project will serve as a testing ground for telesurgery technologies and equipment.

In phase two, MD Anderson surgeons will coach, observe and teach other surgeons.

“MD Anderson has the cancer experience and volume to help lower-volume centers,” says Holsinger. "Telemedicine technology decentralizes knowledge and expertise held within large centers.”

During the last phase, MD Anderson surgeons will assist distant teams using robotic instruments. An additional $2 million is needed to complete the program funding. According to Holsinger, the program falls in step with the direction medicine is headed.

“You have a cohort of students coming of age when we not only have robotic technology but also a way to virtualize education, mentoring and assisting with surgery,” says Holsinger. “It’s a natural evolution of surgical and medical technologies blending with a generation that’s already facile and comfortable with the technology in the first place.”

**Video:** youtube.com/mygivingtomdanderson

**A message from Ronald DePinho, M.D.**

At MD Anderson, clinical research is in our DNA. It’s the engine that drives the outstanding patient care that makes this institution the premier cancer center in the world.

While MD Anderson has earned a reputation as the global leader in cancer care, we will not be satisfied with the status quo. Our unparalleled research program, translates discoveries into novel therapies and diagnostics in the quest to improve patient outcomes, enhance quality of life and ultimately eradicate cancer.

Research is crucial to making a decisive assault on this dread disease. MD Anderson is dedicated to providing our world-renowned scientific and clinical faculty with the best tools to develop and deliver cutting-edge treatments and technologies, such as the evolving telesurgery program described in this issue.

If clinical research is in the institution’s DNA, then philanthropy most certainly is our lifeblood. If research drives our patient care, then your support is the fuel that propels the engine. Your generosity helps make research breakthroughs possible and brings to fruition innovative ideas from the minds of brilliant investigators determined to solve the cancer problem.

These are exciting times, illuminated by a historic confluence of deep knowledge and major technological advances. MD Anderson is poised to accelerate progress in preventing, detecting and treating cancer. The world is counting on us, and we will deliver. Thank you for joining us in Making Cancer History".

**PROMISE**

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**ON THE COVER:** Polo on the Prairie is a multigenerational, annual tradition that offers world-class polo, West Texas-style. Story on page 2. Photo by Dave Batten
Becker receives investigative pathology society’s highest honor

By Mary Jane Schier

Frederick F. Becker, M.D., professor of molecular pathology, received the 2012 American Society for Investigative Pathology Gold-Headed Cane Award during the organization’s annual meeting in San Diego.

The award, a mahogany cane with a 14-carat gold head and engraved band, recognizes Becker’s contributions to pathology, including outstanding research, meritorious teaching and leadership in academic medicine. It’s the highest honor the society gives to a member.

Becker joined MD Anderson in 1976 as professor and chair of the Department of Pathology. Three years later, he published the first paper describing epigenetic changes during pre-malignancy and in malignant tumors. He became the institution’s first vice president for research in 1979, serving in that post for 19 years.

Becker served on the National Cancer Advisory Board from 1990 to 1996. He is a corresponding member of the Royal Academy of Arts and Sciences in Spain.

Alliance in Brazil

MD Anderson and Hospital Israelita Albert Einstein to collaborate

By La Chanda Jenkins

MD Anderson recently announced an agreement with Hospital Israelita Albert Einstein (HIAE) in São Paulo, Brazil, creating an alliance to develop a comprehensive, multidisciplinary oncology program at the hospital.

The 10-year agreement calls for MD Anderson to provide its specialized expertise to help transform HIAE’s oncology program into the premier cancer care center in South America. It will focus on four key initiatives: patient care, research, education and prevention — obviously in line with MD Anderson’s own mission areas.

Brazil, which reports more than 520,000 new cancer cases a year, represents an opportunity to make a lasting impact on cancer care delivery, says Amy Hay, interim vice president for global business development.

“Hosptial Israelita Albert Einstein will incorporate MD Anderson’s multidisciplinary approach to address the cancer burden in Brazil, and MD Anderson will advance its mission by extending its reach to South America,” says Hay. “Most important, patients in Brazil will have a powerful force to aid in their fight against cancer.”

The agreement represents an expansion of a long-standing relationship. HIAE became MD Anderson’s first formal sister institution in 2002, leading to frequent academic exchanges. Prior agreements between MD Anderson and HIAE, starting in 2008, have resulted in the launch of multidisciplinary breast and genitourinary clinics, as well as a redesign of oncology facilities at the HIAE.

MD Anderson president elected to National Academy of Sciences

By Laura Sussman

MD Anderson President Ronald DePinho, M.D., has been elected to the National Academy of Sciences (NAS) — one of the most prestigious accolades bestowed in the United States.

The NAS, established in 1863 by President Abraham Lincoln, is a private, nonprofit society of distinguished scholars engaged in scientific and engineering research. Its most famous members include Albert Einstein, Robert Oppenheimer, Thomas Edison, Orville Wright and Alexander Graham Bell.

“I’m thrilled beyond words,” says DePinho. “It’s recognition of the enormous dedication and talent of the trainees in my lab. I’ve been incredibly fortunate to be surrounded by great people at great institutions in my career.”

“DePinho’s work on telomeres and checkpoints established that telomere attrition can have dual effects in human cancer by driving tumor suppression or enhancement,” according to the academy citation. “His work also uncovered the mechanism for the increasing risk that advancing age confers on the development of the common human epithelial malignancies.”

DePinho is internationally recognized for basic and translational research in cancer, aging and age-associated degenerative disorders. The range of his research includes cancer drug and biomarker development, cancer gene discovery, stem cell biology and development of genetically engineered mouse models to study cancer in humans. His laboratory has produced an array of discoveries leading to better methods of early cancer detection, improved cancer patient care and new cancer drug development.

DePinho will be inducted into the NAS in April 2013.
Kripke Legend Award salutes champion of gender equality

**By Scott Merville**

Nancy Hopkins, Ph.D., noted cancer biologist at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), is the 2012 recipient of the Margaret L. Kripke Legend Award for Promotion of Women in Cancer Medicine and Cancer Science.

The Kripke Legend Award recognizes scientific and medical leaders who have made extraordinary efforts to hire a diverse workforce and advance women's careers. It honors Professor Emerita Margaret Kripke, Ph.D., a distinguished scientist who achieved many firsts for women at MD Anderson, culminating in her promotion to executive vice president and chief academic officer.

"At a time when gender equity issues were not discussed in academia, Nancy Hopkins took the responsibility to shine a light on inequities for women faculty at MIT," says Elizabeth Travis, Ph.D., MD Anderson associate vice president for Women Faculty Programs.

Women Faculty in the School of Science. The group’s 1999 report showed marked disparities between opportunities and treatment for male and female faculty members. The report led to numerous improvements in the status and number of women faculty at MIT and increased awareness on campuses around the nation.

"I’m profoundly honored to receive this award," says Hopkins. "I thank MD Anderson for its leadership on behalf of all women in cancer research and medicine."

**Survivors Say**

Wyatt McSpadden, of Austin, Texas, has been a freelance photographer since 1976, his work appearing in Texas Monthly, the New York Times, Fortune and People, among others. McSpadden has worked on various MD Anderson assignments for almost a decade. University of Texas Press published his book, “Texas BBQ,” in 2009.

I’ve been taking pictures for MD Anderson’s communications team since 2003. If you’ve traveled the institution’s hallways, you’ve likely seen my work on the walls. I’ve logged countless miles walking, pushing gear from building to building, wandering hallways and getting lost — and found again — in this city within a city.

My familiarity with MD Anderson came in handy when a friend battling lymphoma received a stem cell transplant there in 2011. I was with him as he prepared for, endured and completed his arduous (and successful) transplant process. It struck me that I’d spent years in training to be an MD Anderson ‘escort.’

On Aug. 30, 2011, I had surgery to remove a supposedly benign tumor in my left parotid (salivary) gland. A month later, my wife, Nancy, and I found ourselves at MD Anderson as patient and caregiver, roles we’d never imagined for ourselves. My cancer is lymphoepithelioma, a rare disease that affects about seven people per million in the United States. My nine weeks of chemotherapy began in early October, followed by 33 doses of daily radiation plus weekly chemo that wrapped up in late January 2012. On April 23, doctors said my first post-treatment PET scan looked ‘perfect.’ I’m officially in remission.

My newfound insights from the patient’s perspective will inform my work for MD Anderson. I’m grateful to have been treated there and hope to share that gratitude with anyone I have the privilege of photographing.

Promise invites cancer survivors to share their reflections. Email Promise@mdanderson.org.
Fun runs raise money, awareness for colorectal, brain and ovarian cancers

By Johnny Rigg

SCOPE

SCOPE, print for Colorectal Oncology Prevention and Education, set a record this year with 1,939 participants.

The seventh annual 5K run/walk began at MD Anderson’s Lowry and Peggy Mays Clinic on March 24 and included a 1K children’s walk for kids 12 and under.

An after-race party and Survivors Fair offered food, games, live music and information about cancer awareness and support groups.

Founded by MD Anderson’s Kimberly Tripp and Cathy Eng, M.D., SCOPE has raised more than $100,000, increased screening efforts and raised awareness for colorectal cancer.

The number of SCOPE participants increases each year, says Eng, an associate professor in the Department of Gastrointestinal Medical Oncology at MD Anderson.

“We hope the race raises awareness of the importance of screening,” says Eng, “because this cancer is mostly preventable.”

For more information, email scope@mdanderson.org

Run for the Rose

More than 4,500 brain cancer survivors, patients, families and friends gathered at Houston’s Reliant Park March 25 for the 10th annual Run for the Rose.

The 5K race, 1K family run/walk and post-race party support the Dr. Marnie Rose Foundation in raising awareness for brain cancer and funding adult brain cancer research at MD Anderson. The event also funds pediatric brain cancer research at Children’s Memorial Hermann Hospital.

Visit www.runfortherose.com for more information.

Sprint for Life

MD Anderson’s Department of Gynecologic Oncology and Reproductive Medicine celebrated the 15th anniversary of its Sprint for Life 5K Run/Walk with more than 2,500 participants. Their goal: to build awareness about ovarian cancer and raise funds for research.

The May 5 event included a Sprint for Sprouts 1K and a breakfast and reception attended by 78 ovarian cancer survivors and their loved ones. The event raised more than $468,000, with an additional $150,000 of in-kind donations.

The event funded two $50,000 research awards that were presented on race day. Recipients were Alpa Nick, M.D., for circulating tumor cells in ovarian cancer, and Yuexin Liu, Ph.D., for predicting therapy response in ovarian cancer.

“Because of our supporters we met our goals, and our fight against ovarian cancer is stronger than ever,” says Pamela Weems, program manager of community relations and development. Since inception, the event has raised more than $3.6 million for the Blanton-Davis Ovarian Cancer Research Program at MD Anderson.

“Sprint for Life enables us to continue desperately needed research to make significant strides in eradicating ovarian cancer,” says program director Anil Sood, M.D., professor in the departments of Gynecologic Oncology and Reproductive Medicine and Cancer Biology.

Kelli and Eddy Scurlock Blanton Sr., Lee Davis and Gayle Goodman served as event chairs. Presenting sponsors included the Sandra G. Davis family, Gayle Goodman and Ken Adam; HCC Insurance Holdings Inc.; Randalls; the Scurlock Foundation; and The Anne and Henry Zarrow Foundation.

Visit www.facebook.com/sprintforlife.
Donors pony up support for MD Anderson

By Victor Scott

Polo mallets were swinging from Florida to Texas this spring, raising more than $600,000 for cancer research and patient care programs at MD Anderson. Polo Under the Palms in Florida and Polo on the Prairie in Texas are unique fundraising events with championship polo matches as main attractions.

More than 1,500 supporters had the opportunity to watch world-class polo, dine on an abundance of local cuisine, listen to live music and dance the night away — all while supporting MD Anderson’s mission to eradicate cancer.

Video: youtube.com/mygivingtomdanderson

2nd Annual Polo Under the Palms

When: March 24, 2012
Where: Sarasota Polo Club
Lakewood Ranch, Fla.
Chairs: Mary and Jamie Uihlein, Christie and James P. Uihlein
Committee: Lisa Barnott, Rebecca Gutierrez, Candice McElyea, Maryellen Paterson, Michelle Qualley, Michelle Wynne
Team sponsors: Toyota of Lakewood, Harris Private Bank/M&I Wealth Management
Major sponsors: Nancy and Gene Phipps, Mary and Jamie Uihlein, Christie and James P. Uihlein
Total raised: More than $236,400

26th Annual Polo on the Prairie

When: April 28, 2012
Where: Musselman Brothers’ Lazy 3 Ranch
Albany, Texas
Chairs: Melinda and Henry Musselman
Chair Emeritus: Mary Anne McCloud
Committee: Michele Arnot, Susan Cook, Pat Everett, Liz Green, Prissy Harvick, Virginia Musselman, Marci Pearson
Presenting sponsor: Blue Bell Creameries
Major supporters: Melinda and Henry Musselman, Jimmy Musselman, Beal Family, Dian Graves Owen Foundation, Kay R. McMillan, Amy and Timothy Leach, Kathy and Tripp Wommack
Total raised: More than $368,500

Dallas event serves a second helping

‘Living Legend’ returns to raise $773,000

By Sarah Watson

Business and community leaders in the Dallas-Fort Worth area rallied in support of their second A Conversation With a Living Legend® luncheon in four months. The May 9 event at the Hilton Anatole in Dallas raised more than $773,000 for research and patient care initiatives at MD Anderson.

Approximately 660 guests turned their attention to the world-map backdrop behind a well-appointed stage reminiscent of Downing Street as Greta Van Susteren, host of Fox News Channel’s “On the Record With Greta Van Susteren,” interviewed the Right Honourable Tony Blair, former Prime Minister of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. The conversation touched on a variety of topics, from politics to health care policy to Mr. Blair’s teenage dream of becoming a rock star.

Amanda Bush of Fort Worth served as chair of the 23rd annual event, with Leo Corrigan III of Dallas as co-chair.

Andrews Distributing Company and AT&T were presenting sponsors, each with $100,000 contributions.

Since its inception in Dallas in 1990, A Conversation With a Living Legend® has raised $16.47 million through the annual luncheon and similar events in Houston, San Antonio, Atlanta, Las Vegas and Washington, D.C.

The Dallas event has raised more than $12 million, including $855,000 at a Jan. 4 luncheon honoring Virgin Group founder Sir Richard Branson in an interview with broadcast journalist Miles O’Brien.

In 2010, MD Anderson created an endowed Dallas/Fort Worth Living Legend Chair for Cancer Research at MD Anderson. With every $1 million the event raises, a new chair is funded to enhance the institution’s ability to recruit and retain faculty of the highest caliber, advance its research and patient care initiatives and train future generations of physicians and scientists.
TAKING A SHOT AT CANCER

LG Electronics USA and The V Foundation support pediatric cancer research

By Victor Scott

MD Anderson Children’s Cancer Hospital had a home court advantage at the 2012 NCAA® Men’s Final Four® April 1 in New Orleans, thanks to LG Electronics USA being an Official Corporate Partner of the NCAA. LG’s Home Court Challenge, at the NCAA’s Bracket Town®, celebrated the spirit of competition between two college rivals while raising awareness of the need for pediatric cancer research funding.

Patients and their families relived college basketball history, cheering former NCAA basketball all-stars Bobby Hurley from Duke University and Travis Ford from the University of Kentucky, Hurley and Ford competed in a variety of domestic challenges using LG consumer electronics on a basketball-court-turned-model home.

LG senior vice president of marketing James Fishler presented $15,000 to support MD Anderson’s pediatric cancer research.

“LG recognizes MD Anderson’s leadership in pediatric cancer research,” says Fishler. “We’ve supported cancer research for years globally and wanted to bring that support to such an important initiative here in the United States.”

A matching $15,000 gift from The V Foundation, founded by legendary NCAA basketball coach Jim Valvano to support cancer research, resulted in a combined donation total of $30,000.

“We’re truly honored to partner with LG and match its generous donation to support MD Anderson’s research,” says Nick Valvano, chief executive officer of The V Foundation. At center court to thank LG and The V Foundation was Duke University alma Eugenie Kleinerman, M.D., head of MD Anderson Children’s Cancer Hospital.

“We use philanthropic funds, such as the ones we received from LG and The V Foundation, to support the infrastructure we need to do clinical trials and develop new drugs for our patients,” says Kleinerman.

LG also donated a variety of consumer products including smart phones and household appliances to the Children’s Cancer Hospital.

Hope is in the bank

Reliant Energy blood drives support patients

By Julie Penne

When she came to MD Anderson from Michigan for lifesaving surgery last fall, 25-year-old newlywed Katie Uren knew she had the heart — and the multidisciplinary care team — to make it through her complex surgery and recovery.

Uren came to MD Anderson and its Multidisciplinary Pelvic Sarcoma Program after a recurrence of Ewing’s sarcoma, originally diagnosed in 2008. Uren, a licensed practical nurse, understood that she would be under anesthesia for more than 20 hours. She knew that the complication rate was high and that recovery and rehabilitation would be difficult. Still, she had the confidence to press on with surgery.

“I had so much faith in my doctors at MD Anderson,” says Uren.

What she didn’t have was the requisite blood for the 23-hour operation that involved surgical teams specialized in urology, orthopedics and neurosurgery. The large quantity needed of Uren’s rare blood type almost derailed the operation.

That’s where Houston-based Reliant Energy, an NRG Company, entered as an unexpected and welcome member of her support team.

Reliant learned of Uren’s surgery through a KRIV-TV, Fox Channel 26 report and was confident that employees would rally to donate the necessary blood, and then some. Reliant collected a record 82 units during the drive, beating its previous high of 70 units following an appeal for donations to support a Reliant employee’s family member, also under treatment at MD Anderson.

Reliant/NGR has scheduled additional drives for the coming year to make sure the coffers stay stocked.

“A company can schedule blood drives, but it takes people to make them successful,” says Jason Few, NRG executive vice president and chief customer officer, Reliant president and a member of MD Anderson’s Board of Visitors. “The people of NRG and Reliant always respond when there’s a need, and we’re honored to support MD Anderson patients. I’m incredibly proud to work with people who have such passion and commitment.”

Today, Uren is back at home working as a patient advocate at the VA Hospital.
Attitude is everything

**Foundation takes a stand against brain cancer**

*By Victor Scott*

In a waiting room at MD Anderson, just minutes after recovering from a seizure during a pre-operative brain MRI, James Broach sits with his wife, Jamie, by his side. The Houston couple’s smiling faces serve as a positive contrast to their situation. Together, they share the inspirational story of the foundation they started to fund brain cancer research and offer hope to others.

“I feel it’s a calling for me,” says James. “We’re passionate about wanting to make a difference for other patients and to give back to MD Anderson for such great care.”

The couple established the Broach Foundation for Brain Cancer Research in November 2011, just a few months after James was diagnosed with glioblastoma, an aggressive form of brain cancer that has no known cure. Its survival rate is low, due in part to inadequate funds for clinical research. In an attempt to change the statistics, the foundation’s inaugural grant will support the research of James’s neurosurgeon, Frederick Lang, M.D., director of clinical research in MD Anderson’s Department of Neurosurgery.

“Research drives the whole process,” says Lang. “And without research, we’re not going to make an impact on tumors.”

**Fighting cancer with laughter**

Brain cancer is no laughing matter. But for the Broaches, laughter and a positive outlook are powerful weapons in their fight against the disease.

“James has an infectiously positive attitude,” says Jamie. “To him, the glass is always half full, not half empty.”

In that spirit, the couple decided on a comedy-themed gala as their first fundraiser and appropriately called it Stand-Up for Brain Cancer. They called on actor, comedian and former “Saturday Night Live” cast member Kevin Nealon to entertain a sold-out crowd at the River Oaks Country Club in Houston, raising $950,000.

“The more we spread the news about Dr. Lang’s research and how underfunded brain cancer is, the more excited people became about wanting to join the cause,” says Jamie. “The Broaches are committed to reaching a $1 million goal by Christmas 2012.”

“This is all part of a bigger plan for us and our foundation,” says James. “Trying to help a greater cause, whether it’s brain cancer research or MD Anderson or Houston, has been very rewarding.”

Video: thebroachfoundation.org/videos

**THE RIGHT THING TO DO**

**Couple discovers the gift is in the giving**

*By Johnny Rigg*

Reasons to give abound, but for Lewis Jordan and his wife, Joan, recognition is not one of them.

As a former airline executive, Lewis is accustomed to attention. But when it comes to charitable contributions, generally the Jordans prefer to make unrestricted donations and request anonymity.

“We like to give to organizations that we feel a personal connection with,” says Lewis. “While working in Houston, for example, I became aware of the great work MD Anderson was doing. Now, Joan’s pancreatic cancer has been in remission for three years, and we credit her being alive and feeling well to MD Anderson.”

**Long lost love**

In their hometown of Griffin, Ga., the couple began a friendship that would span a lifetime.

“I carry a photo of us that was taken at my 4th birthday party,” Lewis says. “We felt at home again when we were together,” Joan says.

Eventually, Lewis concluded his various business commitments and bought a house on Amelia Island near Fernandina Beach, Fla. to begin a close relationship with his childhood friend.

“We had one year of joy together,” he says. “Suddenly she wasn’t feeling well, and we got the horrible diagnosis.”

In August 2008, Joan began treatment at MD Anderson for pancreatic cancer. Her treatment was temporarily interrupted when Hurricane Ike hit Houston.

It was during this trying time that Lewis and Joan decided to move forward with their plans. On Sept. 20, 2008, the Jordans were married in the chapel at MD Anderson.

“We cannot say enough about the good work MD Anderson does,” says Lewis. “We believe that if you have the ability to give, it’s the right thing to do.”
Kras plays dual role in pancreatic cancer

The Kras oncogene, a genetic mutation that drives the initiation of pancreatic cancer, also manipulates metabolic pathways to encourage tumors to grow, scientists report in the journal Cell. The findings open a new category of potential targets for thwarting the influential mutation, says study co-lead author Haoqiang Ying, Ph.D., instructor in MD Anderson’s Department of Genomic Medicine.

“We’re working with MD Anderson’s Institute for Applied Cancer Science to identify and validate metabolism gene targets for drug development,” Ying says. “Activating mutations in the Kras oncogene are nearly universal in pancreatic cancers,” says study senior author and MD Anderson president Ronald DePinho, M.D., adding that the study is the first to explore Kras’s role in maintaining pancreatic tumors in an in vivo setting.

Funding resources include the NCI, BIDMC Research Capital Fund, Kimmel Scholar Award, AACR-PanCAN Career Development Award and Damon Runyon Cancer Research Foundation.

Drug shrinks melanoma brain metastases

In an international phase I clinical trial reported in The Lancet, an experimental drug targeting a common mutation in melanoma shrank tumors that spread to the brain in nine out of 10 patients. The drug dabrafenib, which targets the Val600 BRAF mutation active in half of melanoma cases, also cut tumor size in 23 of 36 patients with late-stage melanoma that had not spread to the brain.

In four cases, the brain metastases disappeared. “No other systemic therapy has ever demonstrated this much activity against melanoma brain metastases,” says study co-lead author Gerald Falchook, M.D., assistant professor in MD Anderson’s Department of Investigational Cancer Therapeutics.

GlaxoSmithKline sponsored and funded the clinical trial. Phase II and phase III trials of dabrafenib for melanoma are under way.

A step toward personalized breast cancer medicine

Preclinical study changes p53 paradigm

By Scott Merville

Presence of the normal p53 gene, rather than a mutated version, makes breast cancer chemotherapy with doxorubicin less effective, MD Anderson scientists report in the journal Cancer Cell.

Their preclinical study challenges the existing paradigm and marks another step toward personalized medicine for breast cancer.

p53, a tumor suppressor, is mutated or inactivated in the majority of cancers, and about one-third of breast cancers have mutations in the gene. It’s long been thought that normal p53 results in a better chemotherapy response, but the evidence in breast cancer has been conflicting.

The scientists first examined the response to doxorubicin in mice and the role of p53 in the chemotherapy process. When they analyzed the results, they found the mice that responded poorly had normal p53 genes, while the mice that responded best had mutated p53 genes.

Using human breast tumor cell lines with normal p53, the researchers replicated the mouse experiment with the same results. When the cells were treated with doxorubicin, known commercially as Adriamycin®, they basically stopped. When the p53 gene was removed, the cells continued through the cell cycle and eventual destruction.

“There are a lot of data out there on responses to doxorubicin and other drugs that break DNA,” says lead author Guillermina Lozano, Ph.D., professor and chair of MD Anderson’s Department of Genetics. “It’s really important to understand the genetic defects a tumor cell has before we treat it,” she says. Photo by Wyatt McSpadden
Navigating life with cancer

Survivor stays on course by spreading information, awareness

By Johnny Rigg

Each year, Hal Wolff visits his family doctor for regular checkups, treating allergies and monitoring blood pressure. After he turned 50 in 2005, however, the Houston lawyer scheduled a physical that proved far from routine.

“My doctor called to say my blood test showed high PSA (prostate-specific antigen) levels,” says Wolff, a senior partner with Hoover Slovacek LLP, where he focuses on commercial litigation, real estate and employment law. “I didn’t understand its severity at the time.”

A second test confirmed elevated PSA. A few weeks later, doctors discovered three tumors in Wolff’s prostate.

As he surveyed his treatment options, Wolff spoke with multiple doctors, specialists and friends. He decided that, because of his good health and young age, surgery was his best course of action, and that it should take place at MD Anderson.

“The institution came highly recommended to me by a trusted former business partner whose father was a medical doctor in Houston,” Wolff says. “I took this in good faith and never looked back.”

Wolff had been under the misconception that “MD Anderson was more for secondary treatment and more serious cases.”

“I’ve since learned that it should be the first stop for anyone faced with cancer,” he says. Back in 2006, Wolff and his wife, Carol, came to MD Anderson with little knowledge of the institution’s resources, its mission or its campus. The couple found themselves overwhelmed and lost, wandering through the Lowry and Peggy Mays Clinic on the way to his first appointment.

“We came up from the parking garage and were walking through the corridor,” Wolff says. “I saw a man standing near the end of the hall and could tell he was going to ask us if we needed help.”

Wolff avoided eye contact with the stranger as they passed the facility’s landmark Tree Sculpture.

“But as we approached the man he said, ‘Hal?’”

Surprised, Wolff turned to see a familiar face from his past. Fernando Yarrito, a senior director in MD Anderson’s Development Office and Wolff’s old friend from their days at Texas Lutheran College, now Texas Lutheran University (TLU), was finishing up his monthly shift as a volunteer greeter that day.

It had been several years since they’d seen each other, and this chance meeting, this show of friendliness, eased Wolff’s apprehension.

“Fernando was there in the beginning,” Wolff says. “He saw me after surgery and during follow-up visits. A much closer relationship developed after this serendipitous event.”

Wolff says his relationship with MD Anderson is one of “growth.”

“You sense a team atmosphere,” he says. “You feel that everyone’s there for the same purpose and has the same goals.”

Wolff is passionate about spreading cancer awareness from a patient’s perspective.

“I’m one of the information givers now, and I try to give sound advice to men in a similar situation,” he says.

Wolff also serves on the TLU Corporation Board, is the vice president of the TLU Alumni Board of Directors and is a member of the Houston Bar Association Speaker’s Bureau.

“Everything I’ve learned is from my cancer experience,” Wolff says. “In addition to being cancer free, I live a much healthier lifestyle. I’m certain a lot of my understanding of the importance of positive health was achieved through my time at MD Anderson.”
UPCOMING EVENTS

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

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

August
25
Houston:
Little Galleria Back to School Fashion Show

September
14
Houston:
Network Survivorship Conference

October
20
Bastrop:
Cattlemen for Cancer Research Auction

October
22
San Antonio:
A Conversation With a Living Legend® – George W. Bush

October
24
Houston:
MD Anderson Cancer Center Board of Visitors Fall Meeting

October
28
Houston:
Little Galleria Halloween Spooktacular

November
17
Austin:
Rexanna’s Foundation for Fighting Lung Cancer: Huddle Up for a Cure

December
6
Beaumont:
Santa’s Elves Party Benefiting MD Anderson Children’s Cancer Hospital

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