PHILANTHROPISTS
OF THE FUTURE
Young donors
use birthday money,
earnings to fight cancer

Moon shot
momentum:
Major gifts
lead the way

Early detection:
Hope for lung
cancer patients
It’s been said that the early bird catches the worm. The 15th-century English proverb is still a mantra for modern times. Just ask 21st century MD Anderson researchers, clinicians, surgeons and scientists intent on more effectively preventing, detecting and treating cancer — the earlier the better.

MD Anderson’s Moon Shots Program has launched a number of bold projects constituting an all-out assault on cancer. Lung cancer, one of the eight cancers identified in the first round of moon shots, is under attack by a team of experts determined to use early detection to outsmart the deadly disease, the second most common cancer in men and women.

Flagship project

The lung cancer moon shot’s inaugural efforts focus on developing biomarkers that will make it easier to detect lung cancer in its earlier stages. Leaders representing cancer prevention, internal medicine, oncology, radiology, quantitative science and experimental therapeutics are collaborating to create an integrated, comprehensive program that involves an applicable clinical risk prediction model, identifying predictive biomarkers in the airway and blood, and developing advanced imaging techniques.

“The odds are stacked against you when it comes to detecting lung cancer,” says Samir Hanash, M.D., Ph.D., professor in the Department of Clinical Cancer Prevention at MD Anderson and one of several investigative leaders working on this flagship project. “The best way to gain the advantage is to develop strategies that detect cancer in its earliest stages.”

Hanash is the head of the Red and Charline McCombs Institute for the Early Detection and Treatment of Cancer — an institute comprising seven centers focused on molecular-based approaches to cancer diagnosis and management. He brings a breadth of knowledge to the team with his translational efforts aimed at developing marker panels for cancer risk, detection, treatment response and recurrence.

Early bird strategies

“Developing biomarkers shares some of the same challenges as developing drugs,” says Hanash. “It requires a road map from discovery to validation for defined clinical applications.”

A multidisciplinary advisory board and a clinical screening team will provide expertise while four biomarker teams will focus on clinical and genomic risk stratification, airway changes, advanced imaging and blood-based markers.

Identifying those at risk

The goal of the clinical and risk stratification team is to identify a high-risk population for cost-effective surveillance, screening and detection of early stage patients. This team will use preliminary risk prediction models based on cancer control studies and existing
The program was launched in 2010 after the institution’s Lung Cancer Screening Program. The project will also recruit smokers from the high-risk patients enrolled in MD Anderson’s early detection platform lung cancer trial.

Seeking better screening,
blood-based markers

The advanced imaging team will concentrate on screening technology and assessing tumor response. The fourth early detection team focuses on identifying blood-based markers, says Hanash.

“We want to develop an affordable, effective blood-based test to detect lung cancer in its earliest stages,” he says.

Hanash, whose research focuses on multiple cancers, anticipates the next few years will be intense as he and colleagues at the McCombs Institute continue this aggressive approach, leading the effort toward early detection. The goal is to develop biomarkers that detect lung cancer risk and use them to find disease earlier. Hanash hopes history, when it comes to lung cancer risk and use them to find disease early detection. The goal is to develop biomarkers that detect lung cancer risk and use them to find disease earlier. Hanash hopes history, when it comes to lung cancer risk and use them to find disease earlier. Hanash hopes history, when it comes to lung cancer risk and use them to find disease earlier. Hanash hopes history, when it comes to lung cancer risk and use them to find disease earlier. Hanash hopes history, when it comes to lung cancer risk and use them to find disease earlier.

Detecting airway changes

Emerging research has associated lung cancer risk with characteristic changes in the airway lining, or epithelium. The airway changes team is developing risk markers through airway changes detected from nasal and saliva swabs. Samples will be collected from high-risk patients enrolled in MD Anderson’s early detection platform lung cancer trial.

A message from Ronald DePinho, M.D.

Exciting developments are underway at MD Anderson as we move forward with the most ambitious endeavor in this institution’s history. The Moon Shots Program is gaining momentum through the tenacity of hundreds of clinicians and researchers focused on eradicating eight cancers initially selected for this comprehensive effort. Our goal is to drastically reduce cancer deaths and improve survivorship by developing new drugs, improving diagnostics, advancing prevention methods, shaping policy and more.

Prevention and early detection are crucial components of the plan to ensure a future free of cancer for our children and generations to come. That future looks promising thanks to a number of innovative MD Anderson initiatives locally and abroad.

The Moon Shot Program’s cancer prevention and control platform, for example, recently launched the Mexico and Texas Tobacco Control Initiative to reach Mexican and Mexican-American youths. We’re drawing on the success of MD Anderson programs such as ASPIRE (A Smoking Prevention Interactive Experience), an animated web-based, bilingual program that’s helped thousands of young people in Texas and across the world realize the dangers of smoking and tobacco use.

Closer to home, MD Anderson’s Tobacco Outreach Education Program shared ASPIRE and its smoking cessation message with 5,000 Corpus Christi-area middle schoolers at an interactive event made possible through the generosity of local MD Anderson Cancer Center Board of Visitors members (youtube.com/mygivingtomdanderson). These efforts potentially will stem the unacceptable statistics that 17% of children in Texas high schools smoke daily and that 3,800 children start smoking every day throughout the United States.

In early detection, the lung cancer moon shot team aims to attack cancer in its earliest and most curable stages. Using the combined power of serum biomarkers, advanced imaging technology and highly predictive risk models, it will develop more accurate, less expensive screening methods.

We must continue to deliver services that not only help detect and control cancer, but that also inspire parents, educators, legislators and others to help us stop this disease before it starts. It’s encouraging to note that 50% of cancers can be prevented. Additional lives will be saved by early detection. Still more will be rescued from advanced disease through major advances in therapy, most notably immune therapy. With the generosity of people like you who support our mission and understand the urgency of our work, we can and will accomplish these goals. Thank you for joining us in Making Cancer History.

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A new approach to Alzheimer’s

Thanks to Belfer Foundation’s $25 million gift

By Sarah Watson

Experts at MD Anderson, Baylor College of Medicine and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology are uniting to understand the molecular and genetic basis of Alzheimer’s and other neurodegenerative diseases and to find more effective treatments. The Neurodegeneration Consortium (NDC) was created with a $25 million commitment from the Robert A. and Renee E. Belfer Family Foundation.

Recent research has revealed common molecular themes in neurodegeneration, cancer and other age-associated diseases.

The NDC will take a new approach to studying and treating such diseases of the aged. Specialized basic science researchers will identify key molecular targets, while MD Anderson’s drug development team at the Institute for Applied Cancer Science (IACS) will translate these discoveries into viable clinical candidates.

“We want to turn research findings into effective targeted drugs and diagnostics for patients, while ensuring quality of life and helping with the financial challenges of treating and living with Alzheimer’s and other aging diseases,” says Robert A. Belfer, president of the Belfer Family Foundation.


Leading contributors to this effort include:

• William B. Finneran,
• MD Anderson Foundation,
• the annual Polo on the Prairie fundraiser,
• Sterling-Turner Foundation,
• Topfer Family Foundation, and
• Mr. and Mrs. Herb Weitzman.

Exciting research is underway through the NDC, says Ming-Kuei Jang, Ph.D., of IACS.

“The consortium’s first drug discovery program focuses on protective mechanisms to prevent neuronal damage,” he says. “While the NDC is focused primarily on generating new therapies and increasing the understanding of Alzheimer’s disease, patients with other neurodegenerative disorders, including Parkinson’s disease, ALS (amyotrophic lateral sclerosis) and chemotherapy induced neuropathy, will also benefit from such protective therapeutics. Treatment could prevent damage, arrest further decline or reduce the degeneration rate depending on when treatment is administered.”

The second project involves detecting disease in real-time.

“If we can understand the dynamics of disease pathology, we can begin to know when to intervene and how to prevent its devastating effects,” he says.

Video: youtube.com/mygivingtomdanderson

iPromise

In 2001, Anthony Pistone of West Palm Beach, Fla., received a diagnosis of chronic lymphocytic leukemia. His wife, Lorie, reflects on their cancer journey.

“”At times, we face challenges that seem insurmountable. Hearing the word ‘leukemia,’ we try to focus on what matters most, with muddled emotions.

In disbelief, we begin to sift through and realize that there are physicians and researchers who have dedicated their lives to making a difference through perseverance, commitment and passion that transcends medical and scientific obstacles. At MD Anderson, medical miracles and significant achievements are ongoing, thanks to the collaborative efforts of those who reach beyond the inevitable and achieve successful outcomes for their patients throughout the most vulnerable times of their lives.

Having a diagnosis of chronic lymphocytic leukemia is frightening. But after meeting Dr. Michael Keating in January 2011, the future began to be restored with a newfound hope and promise, a promise that had been missing when we met with medical experts from other preeminent medical institutions. Dr. Keating is the most compassionate man I’ve ever met. Couple his compassion, brilliance and wisdom with a genuine love for his patients, and you’ve exponentially improved your chance of achieving success. That success includes managing and controlling the disease and maintaining quality of life while healing the mind, body and spirit.

With all of life’s challenges, we sometimes find that silver lining, one that redefines life’s purpose and redirects our goals and aspirations. Last year, at age 53, I began a nursing program at Florida Atlantic University.

Dr. Keating and MD Anderson have been instrumental in inspiring me to achieve excellence in my professional life. Hopefully one day I’ll join the MD Anderson team in Making Cancer History®.”

Video: youtube.com/mygivingtomdanderson

Do you promise? Tell us why you’re committed to Making Cancer History®.

Send an email to Promise@mdanderson.org.
Guests encouraged to contribute to Moon Shots Program

By Sarah Watson

They came for “A Morning of Moon Shots” and left confident that a new day has dawned in Making Cancer History.

More than 200 participants attended a free MD Anderson seminar in November highlighting the Moon Shots Program, an unprecedented assault on cancer the institution launched in September 2012.

The event was an opportunity to meet moon shot leaders and learn about the team science aimed at beating eight initial cancers — and that eventually will apply to all cancers.

Guests also learned about platforms to provide specialized infrastructure, technologies and/or processes.

Ronald DePinho, M.D., president of MD Anderson, greeted guests before they dispersed to breakout sessions featuring:

• Giulio Draetta, M.D., Ph.D., director of the Institute for Applied Cancer Science;
• Andrew Futreal, Ph.D., professor of genomic medicine, who presented on the big data analytics platform;
• Guillermo Garcia-Manero, M.D., co-leader of the myelodysplastic syndrome/acute myeloid leukemia moon shot with Hagop M. Kantarjian, M.D.;
• Jeffrey E. Gershenwald, M.D., co-leader of the melanoma moon shot with Michael Davies, M.D., Ph.D.;
• Ernest T. Hawk, M.D., who leads the cancer prevention and control platform;
• John V. Heymach, M.D., Ph.D., co-leader of the lung cancer moon shot with Steven G. Swisher, M.D.;
• Michael J. Keating, M.D., co-leader of the chronic lymphocytic leukemia moon shot with William Plunkett, Ph.D.;
• Anil K. Sood, M.D., co-leader of the breast and ovarian cancers moon shot with Gordon B. Mills, M.D., Ph.D., and Mien-Chie Hung, Ph.D.; and
• Timothy C. Thompson, Ph.D., co-leader of the prostate cancer moon shot with Christopher J. Logothetis, M.D.

A lunch panel session generated questions and discussion among supporters eager to be a part of the ambitious endeavor. DePinho welcomed their support, stressing the importance of private philanthropy to the Moon Shots Program’s success.

For more information and to make a donation, visit www.cancermoonshots.org.

Video: youtube.com/mygivingtomdanderson

Leading gifts lay groundwork for moon shots

MD Anderson’s Moon Shots Program, an aggressive, milestone-driven effort initially targeting eight cancers, relies on private philanthropy as a crucial source of funding. Leading contributors to date include:

• Lyda Hill: $50 million,
• Robert J. Kleberg, Jr. and Helen C. Kleberg Foundation: $10 million,
• C.G. Johnson Estate: $10 million,
• The Cullen Trust for Health Care: $2 million,
• Mr. and Mrs. William J. Kyte: $2 million, and
• The John G. and Marie Stella Kenedy Memorial Foundation: $1.5 million.

The Moon Shots Program aims to dramatically reduce deaths initially from:

• acute myeloid leukemia and myelodysplastic syndrome,
• chronic lymphocytic leukemia,
• melanoma,
• lung cancer,
• prostate cancer, and
• triple-negative breast and high grade serous ovarian cancers.

Each moon shot will receive funds and other resources to pursue innovative projects prioritized for greatest patient impact. Specialized platforms will provide infrastructure, technologies or processes that will support all of the moon shots.

MD Anderson’s Moon Shots Program

From left, Penny and John Butler and Charles and Ronnie Giardina compare notes at A Morning of Moon Shots in November.
Safeway and I-SPY2 target breast cancer

National trial to speed new drugs

By Miriam Smith

The I-SPY 2 clinical trial is a national study with a revolutionary goal: to personalize breast cancer therapies and move promising new drugs to market more quickly.

Safeway, parent company of Randalls Food Markets, has supported this research from day one. The study, sponsored by the National Cancer Institute’s Specialized Programs of Research Excellence, began at the University of California, San Francisco (UCSF) in 2008. Two years later, UCSF selected MD Anderson to join the I-SPY team. Connie Yates, Randalls’ director of public affairs, says when the study partnered with the nation’s top cancer center, her team knew it would make a difference in the fight against breast cancer.

The Safeway Foundation has given MD Anderson nearly $2 million; $300,000 was allocated to the I-SPY 2 trial in 2012. “Funding research is a key initiative for Randalls and Safeway,” Yates says. “When there was an opportunity to be a part of I-SPY 2 at MD Anderson, we thought that would be a significant program for our contributions.”

I-SPY 2 participants — women with newly diagnosed, locally advanced breast cancer — are assigned therapies based on tumor characteristics, or “biomarkers.” “Patients are receiving treatments that otherwise wouldn’t be available to them, and they know they’re helping because they contribute information we can use to figure this thing out,” says Ana Maria Gonzalez-Angulo, M.D., the head researcher for the I-SPY 2 trial at MD Anderson.

MD Anderson, we thought that would be a significant program for our contributions.”

Ana Maria Gonzalez-Angulo, M.D., head researcher for the I-SPY 2 trial at MD Anderson, works alongside her senior research assistant, Lakshmy Nair, in the laboratory. Photo by Miriam Smith

Mia Hamilton, of Houston, believes the trial saved her life. She spoke of her experience at a check presentation in November. “Hearing Mia talk about the impact the I-SPY program has had on her life and seeing how she can move forward was a life-changing experience,” says Yates.

BISH Foundation creates hope from loss

Inspiration spurs fight against ovarian cancer

By Miriam Smith

She was told her ovarian cancer was too far along to be stopped. Unwilling to succumb to such a grim prognosis, Linda Verbout of Harlingen sought a second opinion at MD Anderson. It gave Verbout four extra years to fight back in a way that would transcend her own struggles and offer others hope.

“She would say, ‘This is happening for a reason,’” recalls Darlene Gonzalez, Verbout’s daughter, of San Antonio. The reason became clear to Gonzalez at a concert one summer night in 2010 when the performer mentioned she had lost her mother to ovarian cancer.

“I called my mom that night,” says Gonzalez. “She was going through chemotherapy at the time. I told her, ‘There is a reason you’re going through this. Here’s what we have to do…’”

Soon after, the Believers Inspiring Survivors for Hope (BISH) Foundation was born. Gonzalez and her husband, Adrian, serve on the board of directors, as did Verbout, until she lost her battle in July.

“Her attitude just amazed me. She was always so positive,” Gonzalez says.

BISH donated $20,000 to MD Anderson in 2012 and plans to donate $25,000 this year. The foundation raises funds through cookbook sales, a music festival and its biggest event, the “Santa” Antonio 5K, when participants run through downtown San Antonio in Santa suits.

Pedro Ramirez, M.D., professor of gynecological oncology, treated Verbout and her mother. Ramirez developed a strong bond with all three generations of women. “They were enthusiastic about contributing to finding a cure,” he says.

Verbout presented BISH’s first $20,000 contribution to Ramirez. He proudly hangs a memento from that occasion in his exam room.

Gonzalez says she’s even more driven now to give back to MD Anderson in honor of her mother and grandmother.

“What MD Anderson did for both of them was just phenomenal,” she says.
Young donors practice the heart of giving

The future of philanthropy is in good hands

By Victor Scott

Maggie Miller and Sidney Diamond have never met, but the two girls share a strong bond: grandparents, all from Houston, who have endured cancer. Maggie’s grandfather, Roland Chamberlin, died of pancreatic cancer before she was born. Sidney’s grandfather, Alan Gold, died of brain cancer when she was 3. Her grandmother, Carol Gold, is an MD Anderson breast cancer patient.

To help prevent other children from losing loved ones to cancer, both girls are fighting back the best way they know how by helping fund cancer research at MD Anderson.

“I didn’t get to meet my grandfather,” says Maggie, 9, of Houston, who combined her allowance and money raised from a lemonade stand and portraits she painted.

Maggie hand-delivered the $47.46 she raised to MD Anderson’s president, Ronald A. DePinho, M.D., in his office.

“We’re so proud of Maggie,” says her mother, Carrie Miller, a member of MD Anderson’s Advance Team, a volunteer leadership board of community and business leaders who advance the institution’s mission to eliminate cancer.

“We hope her donation inspires other children to think of ways they can raise money to support MD Anderson.”

Sidney’s mother, Julie Diamond of Fort Worth, reflects on the times her father and daughter spent together.

“Dad loved to take Sidney on strolls through Central Park when we lived in New York,” says Julie. “He was a very happy-go-lucky guy.”

Ten years after her grandfather’s death, Sidney continues the family’s fight against cancer.

“Our family has a special connection with MD Anderson because of my parents,” says Julie. “Sidney feels it as well.”

To honor her grandparents, Sidney donated $400 she received at her bat mitzvah to MD Anderson.

“It makes me feel good to donate,” says the 13-year-old. “I hope the money helps take care of my grandmother and other patients, too.”

Half of Sidney’s donation will support brain cancer research through the Alan Gold Memorial Fund for Brain Cancer Research. The other half will support breast cancer research through MD Anderson’s Moon Shots Program.

“Have such sincere children want to have an impact on the human condition, and to see them set such a great example that giving — no matter how much — matters, that’s what life is all about,” says DePinho.

Video: youtube.com/mygivingtomdanderson

Mulvas focus on melanoma

By Miriam Smith

Miriam and Jim Mulva’s recent $5 million gift to melanoma research at MD Anderson is saving lives. At a January ceremony naming the Miriam and Jim Mulva Conference Center in their honor, the room reflected advances in research and patient care.

Miriam says this cause simply “found them” after their son, Jonathan, was diagnosed with melanoma five years ago.

“When this happened to our son, we said, “This is our project,” she recalls.

The Mulvas’ funding supports Patrick Hwu, M.D., chair of Melanoma Medical Oncology; Elizabeth Grimm, M.D., Ph.D., professor, Experimental Therapeutics and Melanoma Medical Oncology; and Jeff E. Lee, M.D., chair of Surgical Oncology and co-director of the Melanoma and Skin Cancer Research Program.

Trey Rood, of Atlanta, had a more complicated prognosis. He came to MD Anderson nearly four years ago with stage IV melanoma that had spread to his lungs and brain. Hwu put some of his latest research to work — a combination of T cells and dendritic cells that, before Trey’s procedure, had been used mostly in mice.

“Trey was one of the first patients in the world to get this combination,” Hwu says. “Miriam and Jim’s gift has helped us tremendously to bring concepts to patients and give therapies that really save lives.”

Trey is in his third year at the University of Georgia, with a lifetime ahead of him.

“The Mulvas’ donation made it possible for me to be here today. I can’t thank them enough for that,” Rood says.

Seeing the impact of their donation hits close to home for the Mulvas.

“MD Anderson is a big organization,” says Jim Mulva, vice chair of the MD Anderson Cancer Center Board of Visitors. “But when you see Trey and his mother, you see how personal it is and how committed everyone is. It’s really inspiring.”

Video: youtube.com/mygivingtomdanderson
Motorcycle group revs up brain cancer research

Sam’s Jam honors late MD Anderson neurosurgeon

By Miriam Smith

Motorcycle enthusiasts and cancer fighters unite on the grounds of MD Anderson. The Riders for the Cure (RFTC) group, comprising MD Anderson employees, patients and friends, supports brain cancer research in memory of beloved co-founding member Samuel J. Hassenbusch III, M.D., Ph.D. The world-renowned MD Anderson neurosurgeon and researcher died of glioblastoma multiforme, a form of brain cancer, in 2008.

“We chose brain cancer research to keep funds close to our hearts,” says Brandy Reed, RFTC vice president.

Hassenbusch’s son, Jason, is an MD Anderson employee and an active RFTC member. He says his father’s legacy is a great source of pride.

“Through his journey, he showed that inspiration, hope and humor can overcome,” Jason says. “He co-founded Riders for the Cure to bridge the gap between motorcyclists and the medical community.”

RFTC hosts its signature event, Sam’s Jam, every October to remember Hassenbusch.

“By hosting this motorcycle ride, we honor Dr. Sam’s spirit, his vitality and, most of all, his commitment to patient care and research,” Reed says.

RFTC’s most recent donation of $12,000 supports the research of Anita Mahajan, M.D. Her phase I/II study aims to improve the symptoms and quality of life for children with recurrent brainstem glioma, a highly aggressive form of brain cancer. The goal is to offer a treatment option for patients with an incurable disease.

“Brainstem glioma is devastating,” says Mahajan, professor of Radiation Oncology. “We’re trying to make the lives of these children and families a little better.”

Mahajan also has an interest in proton therapy, which may benefit children with other types of brain tumors. She works primarily with pediatric patients at the MD Anderson Proton Therapy Center.

RFTC’s membership and fundraising capabilities continue to grow through the expansion of its bi-annual motorcycle rides. The group remains committed to brain cancer research through its funding of studies that focus on a cure or increased quality of life for glioblastoma patients. In the future, they hope to sponsor an endowed professorship that will also support efforts to fight this disease.

To learn more about RFTC, visit www.ridersforthecure.org.

Santa’s Elves spread holiday joy

The seventh annual Santa’s Elves Party at the Houston home of Paige and Tilman Fertitta raised more than $50,000 to benefit patient nutrition research at the MD Anderson Children’s Cancer Hospital. The Houston Children’s Chorus provided entertainment for some 300 guests. Honorary chairs were Patsy and Greg Fourticq and their son, Gregory Fourticq Jr., Diane and John B. Connally III, and Courtney Hill Fertitta and Jason Fertitta.

Ninety miles away that evening, Santa’s Elves also were at work at the home of Michele and Mitchell Smith in Beaumont. Hosts Camille and Chris Ohmstede and Sharon and Scott Parker welcomed 100 MD Anderson supporters, who raised approximately $11,000 for pediatric bone cancer research.

Blackjack club hits it big

The Hampton Post Oak Blackjack Club recently donated $500 to MD Anderson. Pictured with Patrick Mulvey, MD Anderson’s vice president for development, top, are (clockwise) Johannah Wilkenfeld, Ed Morrow and Gloria Scher. Pictured above right are (clockwise from top) Yetta Gilbert, Esther Allewit and Edith Takiff. The club raised the contribution during weekly games at the Houston-area assisted living facility.

Photos courtesy of Tracy Ahrens

From left, John B. Connally IV, Diane Connally, Neil Frances Connally and John B. Connally III. Photo by Pete Beatz

Sam’s granddaughter, Sydney Hassenbusch-Soar, and widow, Rhonda Hassenbusch, honor his legacy at the fifth annual Sam’s Jam held Oct. 13, 2012. Photo by Pam Samuels

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Sam’s granddaughter, Sydney Hassenbusch-Soar, and widow, Rhonda Hassenbusch, honor his legacy at the fifth annual Sam’s Jam held Oct. 13, 2012. Photo by Pam Samuels
Approximately 750 people attended the third annual San Antonio A Conversation With a Living Legend® in October 2012 honoring former President George W. Bush. The event raised more than $390,000 for the Blanton-Davis Ovarian Cancer Research Program at MD Anderson and the Moon Shots Program's breast and ovarian cancers moon shot. Peggy and Lowry Mays and Charline and Red McCombs served as honorary chairs.

Pictured at right with President Bush are, from left, co-chairs Clyde Johnson III, Kim Johnson, Paula Johnson and Clyde Johnson IV.

Unconventional fundraising idea rocks

By Miriam Smith

Rod Ryan, known as "the most dangerous man in Houston radio," has a softer side. The provocative radio host, alongside businessman Joe Dotterweich, both natives of Buffalo, N.Y., have teamed up to support MD Anderson for the past four years. Dotterweich, owner and founder of Bull-Shirts, supplies the fundraising products, while Ryan promotes them to his many listeners on The Rod Ryan Show, which airs weekdays on Houston's 94.5 The Buzz from 6 to 10 a.m.

Proceeds go to breast and prostate cancer research — breast cancer because it's so widespread and prostate cancer for a more personal reason.

"I turned 40 and had an intimate visit with my doctor," Ryan says. "After getting my first check and hearing the statistics about prostate cancer, it almost seemed ridiculous not to do something, knowing that we have so many male listeners."

The team's bold fundraising vehicle, "Boobs Rock" apparel for breast cancer awareness and "Kick Ass" gear for prostate cancer, was Ryan's brainchild.

Ryan and Dotterweich have donated $232,000 to MD Anderson since 2009, including their most recent contribution of $76,000 in 2012.

"It's really a number that, through sales of T-shirts, is pretty amazing," Dotterweich says. "Rod's listeners are such great MD Anderson supporters."

The majority of the money raised supports the breast cancer research of Anthony Lucci Jr., M.D., professor, and Carolyn Hall, Ph.D., assistant professor, both in the Department of Surgical Oncology. Lucci appeared on The Rod Ryan Show in December, and Ryan and Dotterweich visited Lucci and Hall at MD Anderson in January.

“When I talk to them, they give you hope that there may be a finish line,” Ryan says. “That's why it's a no-brainer that we continue with this funding.”

Ryan and Dotterweich have committed to supporting MD Anderson for at least another three years, with a goal of raising $100,000 in 2013.

AT&T tablet donation helps teen patients connect with family friends

By Sara Farris

Last fall, a group of 18 MD Anderson cancer patients and survivors formed imPACT (Patient Advisory Council for Teens), partnering with hospital staff in the decision-making process and working together on patient care projects.

Recently, imPACT members received a donation of 18 Pantech Element tablets from AT&T to help meet one of the council’s goals to improve technology access in the hospital.

Representatives from AT&T came to MD Anderson and presented each council member with a tablet. The tablets will be used in the Patient Tablet Donor program, which lends out tablets and laptops to patients during their hospital stay.

“Our vision is to connect people with their world, and we know that these patients often are isolated from their friends and life back home while undergoing treatment," says AT&T representative Carlos Ramirez. “We hope that these tablets can help patients stay in touch with their friends, family and loved ones while they're at the hospital.”

LEARN MORE AT mdanderson.org/gifts
Anderson scientists have discovered the signaling pathway whereby a master regulator of cancer cell proteins — known as Src — leads to ovarian cancer progression when exposed to stress hormones. Reported in Nature Communications, the study found that beta blocker drugs mitigate this effect and reduce cancer deaths by an average of 17%.

“When Src is triggered by stress, it works like a dam letting out water that causes a flood downstream,” says Anil Sood, M.D., professor in MD Anderson’s departments of gynecologic Oncology and Reproductive Medicine and Cancer Biology.

Future research will look at other biological mechanisms that may be affected by stress. “This is a major step forward in understanding the biology and impact of stress on cancer progression, and it opens the door to study drugs that could inhibit this unique signaling pathway,” says Sood.

Research funding came from the National Cancer Institute, National Institutes of Health, Ovarian Cancer Research Fund, Zarrow Foundation, Department of Defense, Betty Ann Asche Murray Distinguished Professorship, Marcus Foundation, RGK Foundation, Gilder Foundation, C.G. Johnson Jr. estate, Laura and John Arnold Foundation and Blanton-Davis Ovarian Cancer Research Program.

Recent MD Anderson research reveals that depression and certain age-related biomarkers could affect a bladder cancer patient’s disease progression and likelihood of survival. The results also highlight the importance of managing stress and subsequent treatments.

The study indicates that it’s important for physicians to regularly screen cancer patients for depression and to provide appropriate treatments. “People are not focused on treating the depression directly, but on coping with cancer,” says Meng Chen, Ph.D., an instructor in MD Anderson’s Department of Epidemiology.

“This additional stress increases mortality.” The research identified shortened telomere length as an age-associated biomarker in bladder cancer. As part of the aging process, telomeres get shorter, which can indirectly cause the cells to stop dividing and eventually die.

Accordingly, the study revealed that a combination of factors — longer telomeres and low levels of depressive symptoms — greatly increased survival for bladder cancer patients.

Research funding came from the SPORE (Specialized Programs of Research Excellence) in Genitourinary Cancer, Genome-wide Association Analysis of Bladder Cancer and MD Anderson Research Trust.

The study was reported at the 11th annual American Association for Cancer Research international conference.
Triumph Over Kid Cancer Foundation

Teen on a mission to ‘make it better’ for others

By Sara Farris

In the past 30 years there has been little progress against pediatric bone cancer. James Ragan, 19, has made it his mission to change that trend.

James was 13 when he was diagnosed with osteosarcoma, a type of bone cancer. A rising international tennis player, James had to abandon his athletic dreams to undergo limb salvage surgery and intensive chemotherapy at MD Anderson Children’s Cancer Hospital. He didn’t let cancer sideline him for long. James soon picked up golf and eventually earned a spot on Rice University’s golf team.

While other teens are focusing on summer plans, James is balancing treatment for relapsed osteosarcoma with maintaining a 3.75 grade point average at Rice University. His goal is to raise $1.5 million for childhood cancer research.

“I give what I give because MD Anderson has given a lot to me,” says James. “The surgeons, oncologists, child life staff and nurses have always been there for me.”

His first attempt at fundraising started in 2007 with a toga-themed birthday party in his hometown of Corpus Christi. In lieu of gifts, James asked friends and family to donate to his childhood cancer cause, raising more than $40,000 for MD Anderson Children’s Cancer Hospital and Driscoll Children’s Hospital. Ragan and his family have added a golf tournament in Corpus Christi and a fall event in New Orleans, raising more than $800,000 for MD Anderson and attracting an equivalent amount in matching gifts.

In 2010, James and his sister, Mecklin, co-founded Triumph Over Kid Cancer Foundation. Along with MD Anderson, the foundation helped establish the Childhood Sarcoma Initiative to fund pediatric bone cancer research and disseminate research results. It also supports childhood cancer organizations such as Sunshine Kids.

“The people who have donated to the Triumph Over Kid Cancer Foundation and MD Anderson realize that what’s important isn’t dictated by market forces,” says James, who presented the foundation’s most recent gift of $450,000 in January. “They give us hope.”

The foundation’s October event in New Orleans raised more than $150,000, and plans are underway for a Corpus Christi fundraiser in May.

In the past year, on top of his own fundraising efforts, James joined the Sunshine Kids board of directors, advocated on behalf of other patients before the board of the Cancer Prevention and Research Institute of Texas and was honored with a Special Ambassador Award by MD Anderson’s president Ronald DePinho, M.D.

“I’ve met a lot of patients and staff here at MD Anderson who’ve made an impact in my life. Many of those patients have passed away, unfortunately,” says James. “I feel like I’m still here to help give back and make it better for other patients.”

Video: youtube.com/mygivingtomdanderson

Survivors Say

John Webb retired in 1996 as president of Exxon Chemical Americas. He is a three-time cancer survivor and longtime MD Anderson supporter. He and his wife, Francine, live in Austin.

“"In April 2012, I was diagnosed with squamous cell lung cancer. I immediately went to MD Anderson and met with my oncologist, Dr. Jonathan Kurie, and my radiologist, Dr. James Cox. We embarked on a seven-week treatment plan — daily proton therapy and weekly chemotherapy. I finished the treatments in time to return to Austin for the Fourth of July.

I began physical therapy and then returned to MD Anderson at the end of July for my first check-up, which showed me to be cancer free. That was a happy day, to say the least.

I was feeling better every day, and as my doctors had said I could do any activity I wished, I decided to go to Alaska to fish.

On Labor Day weekend, one of my sons, Keith, and I had good luck fishing for silver salmon and trout at the Bristol Bay Lodge.

The day this photo was taken, we were stuck for an extra night in a tent camp during an Arctic storm — 70 mph winds and 40 degree temperatures. I worried about pneumonia, but I had no health problems. It was a great way to celebrate the recovery process.

While everyone fears contracting cancer, being treated at MD Anderson gives one hope and confidence to win the battle. The competence and caring of the doctors and staff are wonderful. The equipment, particularly at the Proton Therapy Center, is magical. MD Anderson is the best possible place to fight this awful disease.

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

Comments? Suggestions? We welcome your perspective. Email us your thoughts:
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