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Cancer Patient looks Beyond Own Plight To Champion Outcome For Others



July 9, 2018
By: Karen E. Butler, Director of Communications



Trish Mackey presents a check for more than $10,755 to Jeffrey Crawford, MD. Also pictured: Aviva Emmons, RN; Michael Mackey; and Susan Blackwell, PA.

Patricia "Trish" Mackey and her husband, Michael, love nothing more than to rally friends and family around their dining room table for an evening of lively conversation and fabulous food. For a period of time, they hosted an annual gathering in which they whipped up huge spreads fit for royalty, asking only that their guests leave a small donation for the local food bank the couple supported. After several years, the annual dinner party fell to the wayside, having outgrown the venue and exhausted bandwidth.

However, after Trish, a triage nurse at Duke, was unexpectedly diagnosed last year with stage 4 adenocarcinoma in her lung, the onetime family feast made a resurgence, taking on magnified significance and new direction.

"Trish's diagnosis was a shock," said Michael, a schoolteacher who for some years also operated a deli at Duke University School of Law. "When we got past the momentary disbelief we began to think hard about how we could make a difference."

Since their marriage 41 years ago, bonding time for the couple has always revolved around cooking. Michael, also known to the family as the "sous chef," and Trish find some of their most meaningful moments together in the kitchen. Throughout the years, they've used their hosting and culinary talents to give back to their community. In the throes of chemotherapy treatment to keep her cancer at bay, Trish hatched a plan to bring back the annual dinner party—this time to raise funds to defeat cancer.

"I'm so very grateful for the wonderful care I've received at Duke, and I want everyone to have access to this level of care," shared Trish. "Michael and I wanted to do something that would express our gratitude and also help to keep lung cancer research moving forward."

The couple went all out—devising a menu for a Louisiana crawfish boil, renting a huge tent for their backyard and sending out a multitude of invitations to friends and family. This meal would be like no other.

While Trish and Michael were busy organizing the dinner, their son Michael Jr., 40, was putting together his own plan in which he hoped to add to the funds raised through his parents' efforts. He created an online giving page, "Cancer Can Bite The Big One". There, he poured out his heart, sharing what he had observed about what it means to live with cancer.

"It means putting your life in the hands of those around you," he wrote. "It means scans, blood tests, doctor's appointments, chemotherapy, radiation therapy, medications and side effects. It means not being able to hold your one-year-old grandson because it may cause a bone to fracture."



One hundred guests attended the May 19 benefit crawfish boil held in the Mackey's backyard. Although there were significant downpours, the rain didn't dampen spirits.

On his fundraising page Michael Jr. hailed his mother's clinicians and went on to urge anyone reading his page to give to help "kick cancer to the curb." His wife, Kim; his sister, Lisa; and his brother Matthew and his wife Jane helped to spread word, emailing the link to everyone they know. They hoped those visiting online would be moved and engaged to give generously.

In spite a blustery downpour, on Saturday, May 19, the couple and 100 of their favorite guests chowed down on Cajun-style crawfish, jumbo shrimp and fresh corn, enjoying an evening filled with not only great food, but also laughter and good fun. To their amazement, family and friends stepped up to give Trish and Michael almost $5,000 for the cause. Michael Jr., through his online fundraiser, surprised his parents with a symbolic check for $5,755. In early June, the family visited Duke Cancer Center to present a check for more than $11,000—the combined proceeds—to Trish's medical oncologist Jeffrey Crawford, MD, and his team.



Michael Mackey Jr. reveals to his parents the funds raised through an online fundraising page set up by the Mackey children and their families. Together, the Mackeys raised more than $10,000 to benefit the Thoracic Oncology at Duke.

"It is very motivating to see a cancer patient in the midst of treatment, with its many effects and unexpected complications, look beyond her own situation to focus on raising funds to make a difference for others," shared Crawford, who hopes Trish will be eligible in the near future for a clinical trial of a new agent. "We are grateful for Trish and Michael and thank them for their support."

To create a cancer fundraising event or to create an online fundraiser to honor or memorialize a loved one, visit MyDukeCancerFund.org or contact Erin Tait at 919.385.3126.

The Lung Cancer Initiative of North Carolina will host its 12th annual LUNGe Forward 5K and Family Fun Walk on Sunday, Sept. 23, at Midtown Park at North Hills in Raleigh, North Carolina. Funds raised support lung cancer research at Duke and beyond. Trish and her team, Trish's Krewe, will be participating. To join the team or to give, please go to Trish's Krewe.

Topics:
lung cancer, Lung Cancer Initiative of North Carolina, Lung Cancer Initiative, LUNGe Forward, Jeffrey Crawford, Michael Mackey, Patricia Mackey, Susan Blackwell