

centerpoint

Yale Cancer Center's community newsletter spring 2008

Yale **CANCER CENTER**
A Comprehensive Cancer Center Designated
by the National Cancer Institute



PETER BAKER

Paul and Audra Riccitelli have reason to celebrate and enjoy each day together.

Cancer Creates a Stronger Bond for Newlyweds

As a newly married couple Audra and Paul Riccitelli were looking forward to starting their new life together. They were young, healthy, and eager to venture into new careers and to share new experiences. However, when Audra was diagnosed with stage I medullary breast cancer two months into their marriage, everything changed, and would continue to change more than they could have imagined.

In September of 2004, Audra found a lump in her breast and went to have it checked. Her physician told her it was nothing to worry about and asked her to return in six months. Thanks to the urging of her husband, however, Audra decided to make an appointment for a second opinion at Yale Cancer Center. A biopsy confirmed Audra's diagnosis. "If it wasn't for my husband I wouldn't be here today. It was because of his persistence and encouragement that I pursued the lump and had it checked out further," Audra said. Audra had a lumpectomy and received radiation treatment and by October of 2005 she was beginning her recovery.

A year to the day that Audra received her diagnosis, she drove her husband Paul to the hospital with flu-like symptoms. A few hours later he was being rushed by

ambulance to Yale Cancer Center where he was diagnosed with acute promyelocytic leukemia (APL). He had an extremely high white blood cell count and his outlook was bleak. Paul received aggressive chemotherapy and was in Yale-New Haven Hospital for 25 days. Paul comments on his physician at Yale Cancer Center, Peter Marks, MD, PhD, Associate Professor of Hematology, by saying, "He was the first doctor that made me feel comfortable and that I felt really cared. I am so blessed to have him as my physician." After chemotherapy, Paul continued with chemo-maintenance for two and a half years where his white blood cells were monitored to make sure they were decreasing in number. Today, thankfully, they are both in remission.

When Paul was diagnosed with leukemia, Audra was still in recovery from breast cancer. "It was extremely scary. I had no idea what was going to happen. I was just recovering from my own cancer and now I was watching my husband struggle. Seeing the person that you love most in life suffer is unbearable and heart wrenching. For the first time in my life I felt completely vulnerable," Audra said. She moved into the hospital to be with Paul during his chemotherapy.

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West Campus Sets the Stage for Cancer Research Expansion

One year has passed since Yale University President Richard C. Levin announced the acquisition of the former Bayer complex in West Haven to expand the University's science and medical research facilities to a new "West Campus." With discussions well underway for the use of the complex, which features approximately 550,000 square feet of laboratory space, as well as office buildings, warehouses, and other facilities, Yale Cancer Center is actively involved with plans to develop an expanded cancer biology research program.

"The new West Campus facility will allow us to recruit a critical mass of cancer researchers who will collaborate together in this new space. Without dedicated space, Yale has never had the ability to create the coordinated cancer research effort that the West Campus will give us," Daniel DiMaio, MD, PhD, Scientific Director of Yale Cancer Center and the Waldemar Von Zedtwitz Professor and Vice Chairman of Genetics said.

The expansion of cancer research efforts at Yale is timely for several reasons. The completion of the human genome sequence has provided unprecedented insight into overall human genetic composition and the role our genes play in the development of cancer and response to treatment. New technological advances and new biological tools have also opened new areas of cancer research.

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The Smilow Hospital Campaign



The Smilow Cancer Hospital will be a world-class cancer hospital right in Connecticut. Building on the rich scientific tradition of Yale Cancer Center, it will enhance an exceptionally successful program that is bringing laboratory discoveries quickly and efficiently to advance clinical patient care. The cancer hospital is building hope for the patients of tomorrow and for the search to find the cure.

The case for continued financial support has never been stronger so please consider a contribution today.

For more information, please go to
yalecancercenter.org/involved

Director

Richard L. Edelson, MD

Deputy Director, Administration

Cathy Vellucci

Director, Public Affairs and Marketing

Renee Gaudette

Contributing Writer

Emily Fenton

Design

Imagemark.net

Yale Cancer Center

yalecancercenter.org

333 Cedar Street

PO Box 208028

New Haven, CT 06520-8028

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Mount Mckinley Climb to Benefit Yale Cancer Center

Connecticut mountaineer, Lew Nescott, Jr., in partnership with Trailblazer LLC, will climb Alaska's Mount McKinley this coming July to benefit the Yale Cancer Center Breast Cancer Program. Sponsored by Trailblazer, LLC, the climb will raise funds to support state-of-the-art breast cancer research underway at Yale and will honor the courage of survivors, and the memory of those before them.



Lew Nescott (left) trains with Marc Davis early one morning at Coxe Cage.



DAGSJO/ISTOCKPHOTO.COM

Standing 20,320 feet above sea level, Mount McKinley is the highest point in North America and one of the seven highest continental summits in the world. Located at a latitude that is more northerly than Mount Everest, climbers have been known to experience hurricane-force winds in excess of 100 miles per hour with arctic temperatures approaching 50 below zero. Despite such challenges, Lew considers it, "A privilege to climb in support of Yale Cancer Center's mission to bring tomorrow's treatments and cures to patients today." Having witnessed the heroic struggles of women with breast cancer, it is a mission that he does not take lightly.

Lew has been training with Marc Davis, the assistant track coach and sprint coach at Yale University, since July of last year. Marc developed a special high-altitude program specifically for this climb.

Dr. Lyndsay Harris, Director of the Yale Cancer Center Breast Cancer Program and co-Director of the Yale-New Haven Breast Center,

looks forward to the benefits that the climb will have. "Lew Nescott's climb is going to have a positive affect on Yale Cancer Center and the Breast Cancer Program. Support such as this is so encouraging."

Weather reports are expected to be relayed back from Mount McKinley during the climb via the New Haven Register website at www.nhregister.com

The climb is going to be a great challenge, and with the help of others, will yield many great benefits as well. ☺

To find out how you can make a donation to support breast cancer research, please go to yalecancercenter.org/involved/climb.html

The Connecticut Challenge: Cycling for Cancer Survivors

The Connecticut Challenge is a non-competitive bike ride to raise money to support cancer survivorship initiatives at Yale. The fourth annual event will take place in Fairfield, CT on July 26th and all proceeds raised will directly support the Connecticut Challenge Survivorship Clinic at Yale Cancer Center and the HERO's Clinic for Pediatric Cancer Survivors at Yale School of Medicine. Proceeds from the first three years of the ride have totaled over \$1,250,000 to support the clinics.

The National Cancer Institute estimates that there are over 11 million cancer survivors in the United States. The CT Challenge Survivorship Clinic and HERO's Clinic provide screening for long-term consequences resulting from

cancer treatment and helps to empower survivors to take steps to maximize their health, quality of life, and longevity. For more information, please call (203) 785-CARE.

Riders can register for the 12, 25, 50, or 100 mile bike ride by visiting the Connecticut Challenge website at www.ctchallenge.org, volunteers for the event are also needed. Donations can be given online or mailed to the Connecticut Challenge, PO Box 566, Southport, CT 06890.



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“Why We Ride...”

“Why do we ride? Of course we ride to raise as much money and awareness as we can to help those affected by cancer. We also ride to honor those who have survived cancer, those who have succumbed, those who are battling with cancer as you read this, those who dedicate their lives and their careers to treating people affected by it and one day, we believe, will find a cure. Finally, we ride to remember our journey, and to celebrate with all of our friends and family that journeyed with us. Remembering helps us come to terms with what happened, to find a place for it in our lives, and to appreciate all the good things that flowed from it. To borrow from Lance Armstrong, the Connecticut Challenge is not about the bike. It is a celebration of life by those who have learned to appreciate it.”

Martin Whittaker
Darien, CT

Luke and his father, Martin, at their home in Darien, CT.

The Whittaker's Story

Our story began on December 17th, 2002, when Luke, our eldest son, was diagnosed with acute lymphoblastic leukemia. He had just turned 5 years old. After 18 months of chemotherapy, he relapsed and it was clear he needed a bone marrow transplant to save his life. Luke's little sister Grace, our 'gift from God', was a perfect match and the transplant was performed. Now, three and a half years later, he is a healthy and happy big brother to Nathan (7), Grace (6), and Bobby (2), and a loving son to Brenda and me.

Eighteen months after the transplant, I was sitting in the Darien movie theater with Luke and Nathan and I happened to see a short film that told the story of the first CT Challenge in 2005. As I watched, two things struck me. The first was that now Luke himself was considered a cancer survivor – something which even now seems nothing short of a miracle – and it was time to give something back. During that first ride, with my lungs at a near bursting point, the pain searing through my legs, and the rain stinging my eyes, I had only to think of my son's unending courage and determination during the years of hospital treatment to draw fresh inspiration. Last year, Luke, Gracie, Nathan, and Bobby rode in the children's ride, and Luke even led the lap of honor before the main ride. ☺

Dr. Madhav Dhodapkar Named Director of Hematologic Malignancies



Yale Cancer Center is pleased to welcome Madhav Dhodapkar, MD to the new position of Director of Hematologic Malignancies. The Arthur H. and Isabel Bunker Professor of Medicine at Yale School of Medicine and Chief of Hematology at Yale-New Haven Hospital, Dr. Dhodapkar's clinical and research interests focus on the treatment of myeloma with a concentration on tumor-immune responses and development of novel biological therapies.

"Dr. Dhodapkar's experience and expertise in the treatment of hematologic malignancies, especially in myeloma, is a true asset to Yale Cancer Center. With his leadership, mentorship skills, research accomplishments and innovative clinical approaches, we are looking forward to achieving new advances in the treatment of these diseases," said Richard L. Edelson, MD, Director of Yale Cancer Center.

Dr. Dhodapkar earned his medical degree from the All India Institute of Medical Sciences in New Delhi, India and completed his fellowship in medical oncology and hematology at the Mayo Clinic. His clinical activities have focused on myeloma and related plasma cell diseases, initially at the Myeloma Institute in Little Rock, and then at Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center. Prior to coming to Yale, Dr. Dhodapkar served as the Leon Hess Associate Professor and Head of the Lab of Tumor Immunology and Immunotherapy at The Rockefeller University.

Discovery to Cure: Striving to Achieve New Breakthroughs

The Discovery to Cure Program has already achieved great success through the research leadership of Gil Mor, MD, PhD, with new early detection testing and innovative treatment options available for ovarian cancer. To build on its accomplishments, the program recently recruited Alessandro Santin, MD, a successful clinician and researcher in gynecologic oncology from the University of Arkansas to join Dr. Mor. While at the University of Arkansas, Dr. Santin worked on developing a therapeutic vaccine for the treatment of Human Papillomavirus (HPV) infected cervical cancer. At Yale, he plans to expand this therapy to treat ovarian cancer, while continuing his research to develop other groundbreaking cancer vaccines.

The therapy Dr. Santin developed for cervical cancer works by using powerful stimulator cells, known as dendritic cells, to activate a patient's own immune system against viral proteins expressed in the tumor cells while sparing the healthy cells. Dendritic cells, the "sentinels" of the immune system, are the most potent antigen presenting cell in our body. "With this therapy we are able to load the dendritic cells outside the body with fragments of one of the viral proteins present in the tumor of the patient," Santin said. When they are fully mature, they are then injected back into the patient to warn the lymphocytes in the blood stream, which seek and destroy cells with the identical antigen. They alert the body to danger and to activate the immune system to recognize and kill the tumor.

Dr. Mor is excited to begin work with Dr. Santin. Dr. Mor and his team have recently developed a blood test for the early detection of ovarian cancer that has

explained. "We hope that this will soon become a routine test for women in the early detection of ovarian cancer and significantly decrease the high death rate of ovarian cancer." When ovarian cancer is caught in its early stage, it is easier to treat and manage. Up until now, there were no sure methods for detecting ovarian cancer until it had progressed, making it the leading cause of gynecologic cancer deaths in the United States and three times more lethal than breast cancer.

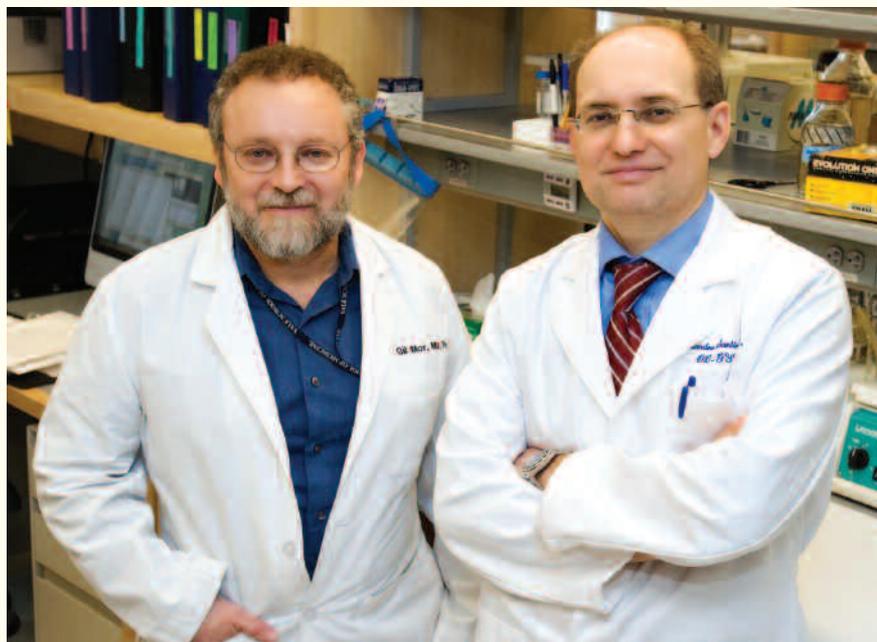
The Discovery to Cure Program at Yale seeks to achieve accurate detection of ovarian and other reproductive cancers at their earliest stages while offering women at increased risk for cancer with high quality, compassionate clinical care. "There has always been a fantastic gap between the clinic and the lab. Now, with a patient's consent, we are able to work directly with the patient and collect samples that are useful to us in the research lab. This makes it easier and quicker to get new developments out to benefit all patients," Mor said.

Dr. Santin plans to work with the Discovery to Cure Program on a new study he calls, "genetic fingerprinting for ovarian cancer." Dr. Santin recently received funding from the National Institutes of Health (NIH) for this very important and exciting new study looking at ways to develop an effective therapy against chemo-resistant/recurrent ovarian cancer. "Although many patients with advanced stage disease initially respond to standard therapy, nearly 90% develop recurrence and the tumor eventually becomes chemotherapy-resistant," Santin explained. His team has discovered genes that encode for receptors highly expressed in chemo-resistant/recurrent ovarian cancers that may render

these tumors highly sensitive to killing by a bacterial toxin. This discovery has the potential to rapidly evolve into a highly effective strategy for the treatment of ovarian cancer that is resistant to chemotherapy, and may possibly work for other human tumors as well.

Dr. Santin and Dr. Mor are part of a multidisciplinary team at Yale dedicated to discovering new ways to detect, treat, and cure gynecologic cancers. Working together with the clinicians, they are able to bring new research discoveries to patients much quicker than

before. With a blood test that is 99.4% effective in detecting ovarian cancer at its earliest stage and the therapeutic vaccines that Dr. Santin is developing, women diagnosed with a gynecologic have new hope with the help of the Discovery to Cure Program. ☺



Dr. Gil Mor and Dr. Alessandro Santin are collaborating to advance the detection and treatment of gynecological malignancies.

99.4% accuracy. This means fewer false positives and false negatives for women, which is a huge accomplishment. "With this blood test we are able to detect a tumor earlier by monitoring changes in the body that occur due to the development of the tumor," Mor

La Cassa Magica Raises Funds to Support Clinical Trials at Yale Cancer Center

Yale Cancer Center's ninth annual black-tie benefit, *La Cassa Magica*, was held on Saturday, April 26th at the Belle Haven Club in Greenwich, CT. The evening raised over \$420,000 to support the clinical trials program at Yale Cancer Center, which provides cancer patients with access to the most innovative treatment options available.

Blythe Danner and **Gina and Chris Lemmon** were the Vice Chairs for the evening, which was hosted by Yale Cancer Center Board member **Paula Zahn**. **Kathryn Anderson Adams** of Greenwich Chaired the event. Corporate Chairs for *La Cassa Magica* included, **Louis Chênevert**, **Paul K. Kelly**, **Nicholas T. Makes**, and **Joseph R. Perella**.

Dr. Richard Edelson, Director of Yale Cancer Center, who recently announced he was stepping down from his position to pursue his research interests, was honored for his leadership at the Center and presented with a gift from the Yale Cancer Center Advisory Board.



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Yale Cancer Center would like to thank the generous underwriters for the evening: **Duke Brodsky**; **Mr. and Mrs. George Crapple**; **Susan and Robert Evans**; **Mr. and Mrs. G.S. Beckwith Gilbert**; **Mr. and Mrs. Jed Manocherian**; **Amy and Joseph Perella**; **Drs. Beth and Richard Sackler**; **Rusty Hirst**, **Turner Construction Company**; **Louis and Debbie Chênevert**, **United Technologies Corporation**, and **Gail Brekke Vlock and Jim Vlock**.

In addition to a silent auction, the evening included a dramatic reading by **Chris Lemmon**, who recently published his memoir, "A Twist of Lemmon." Mr. Lemmon has starred in over twenty-five feature films and in television series for all major networks. He is currently in development on his film, "Publicity Stunt," which he wrote and will produce and star in.

An active force in the New York musical community, **Barry Levitt** performed a series of numbers from "Her Song" to conclude the evening. Produced by Levitt, "Her Song" is a musical story of the great women song writers currently running at Birdland. ♻️



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1 Beck Gilbert, Paula Zahn, Dr. Richard Edelson, Kathryn Anderson Adams, and George Crapple
2 Chris and Gina Lemmon
3 Duke Brodsky, Susan Owens, and Howard Brodsky

4 Dr. Mel Goldstein and Yale School of Medicine Dean Robert Alpern, MD
5 Louis and Debbie Chênevert and Margery and Stephen Riker
6 Carol and George Crapple, Darby and Allan Cartun, and Alicia and Ray Joslin

Yale CANCER CENTER answers

A Weekly Radio Program
on WNPR – Connecticut
Public Radio

Sunday Evenings at 6:00 PM

June 8, 2008

Dr. Mario Sznol
Cancer Drug Development

June 15, 2008

Dr. Daniel Boffa
*New Surgical Treatment Options for
Esophageal Cancer*

June 22, 2008

Dr. Charles Cha & Dr. Wasif Saif
Management of Liver Metastases

June 29, 2008

Dr. Harriet Kluger & Dr. Edward Uchio
Treatment Advances for Kidney Cancer

July 6, 2008

Dr. Vincent DeVita, Jr.
The History of Cancer Chemotherapy

July 13, 2008

Jeff Keith
The Connecticut Challenge

July 20, 2008

Dr. Jimmie Holland
Psycho-Oncology

July 27, 2008

Matthew Loscalzo, MSW
*Helping Spouses to Cope with
a Cancer Diagnosis*

For the latest schedule information and
audio and written archives of all shows,
please go to yalecancercenter.org/answers



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Connecticut Blood Services Region

Providing for patients at Yale Cancer Center.
Please consider yourself asked and donate blood.
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» West Campus Expansion continued from page 1



The former Bayer complex in West Haven.



These scientific advances, combined with the successful renewal of the National Cancer Institute comprehensive cancer center status and grant and the construction of the Smilow Cancer Hospital will usher in a new era of excellence in cancer research and clinical care at Yale Cancer Center.

"This is an exciting time for cancer research and clinical care, and the West Campus provides a unique opportunity to catapult Yale to the first rank in these areas," DiMaio said.

The new West Campus cancer research programs will primarily focus on basic cancer research with translational potential, and will be headed by senior cancer biologists recruited to come to Yale. The current plan

is to build programs in cancer genetics and genomics, exploration of cellular signal transduction pathways, and tumor immunotherapy with the recruitment of 15-20 new faculty members. "These three components of the Cancer Biology Program will reinforce each other and the existing research and clinical components at the Cancer Center. Ultimately, the integration of these areas is expected to become a mainstay in cancer diagnosis, therapeutic development, and treatment decisions," DiMaio explained. ☺

» Stronger Bond for Newlyweds continued from page 1

"My wife is a hero in every sense of the word, not just my hero, but a true hero," Paul said. Both Paul and Audra agree that they could not have asked for a better support system than the one they found in each other.

Because Audra's cancer is indicative of a genetic mutation, she had genetic testing done after receiving counseling from Ellen Matloff, MS, Director of Cancer Genetic Counseling at Yale Cancer Center. "Ellen was a godsend to me. She was amazing and helped me understand the procedures and tests," Audra said. Audra tested positive for the BRCA1 gene mutation. Although the couple is now dealing with fertility issues, they are glad they have all the genetic information they need to monitor their health.

Having come through this experience together Audra and Paul are extremely close and have learned a lot about each other along the way. Although cancer put their lives on hold, they are closer and more positive than ever before. "Having to manage both the physical and emotional pain of cancer has given me clarity and a heightened sense of perspective and awareness in my life. As horrific as cancer is, it led me to confront my own raw emotions. I realized that you only have one life and if you want inner peace and happiness then you must believe in yourself in order to achieve the goals

that looked insurmountable before cancer changed your perspective. I now know how important it is to find someone that you truly love," Audra said.

Audra, who was a high school English teacher, has now decided to write a book about young adults and cancer. She notes that there are not a lot of books, if any, that deal with this issue. Even though everyone's experience with cancer is different, she wants to be able to connect and talk with young people about what they are going through. Both Paul and Audra speak with young people who have recently been diagnosed with cancer. "Suffering leads to humanity, the worst and best of it. When you suffer in this way you look at people differently, and you look at life differently. You are more in tune with other people's suffering and therefore are in a better position to help," Paul explained.

"When we tell people that we've had cancer they don't believe us. Having cancer this young changes everything, but we are closer and have a more positive outlook on life now," the couple said. They are focused on helping people and giving back, which is something they have always wanted to do. Audra and Paul remain a young, healthy, and eager couple ready to begin their new life together; only this time around they know exactly what they are living for. ☺

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