



## Message from Cristy

Dear Friends,

**Hope.** It's a powerful word that holds infinite possibilities. Hope is a motivator that keeps us moving forward – especially during a challenging health care journey.

As you read this issue of *Inspire*, you will see hope in many forms from a variety of people. From the hope that a therapy or a treatment will work, or that research or clinical trials will provide good news to someone facing cancer, to the hope that a gift will transform hundreds of lives.

Your generosity to Aurora Health Care Foundation makes hope possible. Health care impacts all of us – our loved ones, friends and neighbors. And it is constantly changing. Your support helps us lead at the forefront of medical advancements, acquire best practices and grow clinical research to provide you with cutting-edge care.

We are all connected and all play a role in advancing health care. Every act of generosity makes a difference. Together, we will continue to provide hope and change lives.

Always,



Cristy Garcia-Thomas  
President, Aurora Health Care Foundation and  
Chief Diversity and Inclusion Officer, Aurora Health Care



Cristy Garcia-Thomas with Jennifer Bartolotta and Nan Gardetto (in front), two co-chairs for the 2015 Aurora Signature Gala. Read more about this impactful event on page 6 (not pictured, Joe Bartolotta).

“As you read this issue of *Inspire*, **you will see hope in many forms** from a variety of people.”

~ Cristy Garcia-Thomas

**Create hope,** support Aurora Cancer Care and join us for a **Lombardi Walk to Tackle Cancer** near you!



Former Green Bay Packer Santana Dotson at the 2014 Walk/Run in Milwaukee. Dotson will be back again this year as the 2015 Lombardi Walks Chairperson.

All donations support local Aurora Cancer Care programs and our Vince Lombardi Cancer Clinics in each community.

**Oshkosh: June 6**

**Milwaukee Walk/Run and  
Walworth County: June 13**

**Kenosha and Green Bay: June 20**

**Start building your team today!**  
Register now at [lombardiwalk.org](http://lombardiwalk.org)



# The Future of Neuroscience

## How doctors at Aurora Neuroscience Innovation Institute gave Lee his life back

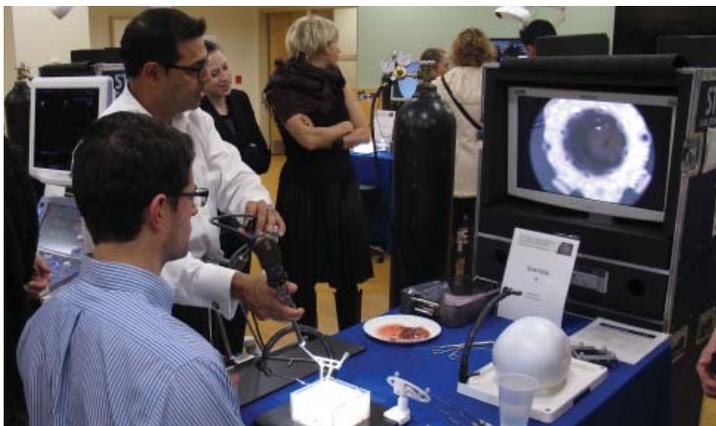
There's something happening at Aurora St. Luke's Medical Center that is transforming lives in Milwaukee and across the country. 44-year-old Lee is one person whose life was changed after meeting with a team of skilled brain and neck surgeons, as well as the compassionate radiation and medical oncology team at the Aurora Neuroscience Innovation Institute.

There was an itchy, irritated spot on Lee's chest that wouldn't go away. A visit to his local dermatologist in Little Rock, Ark. determined that it was melanoma. The cancerous area was removed not once, twice but five times. On the fifth time, lymph nodes were also removed. A full body scan indicated that there was a spot in his brain. After treatments were completed, Lee was informed that he was cancer free.

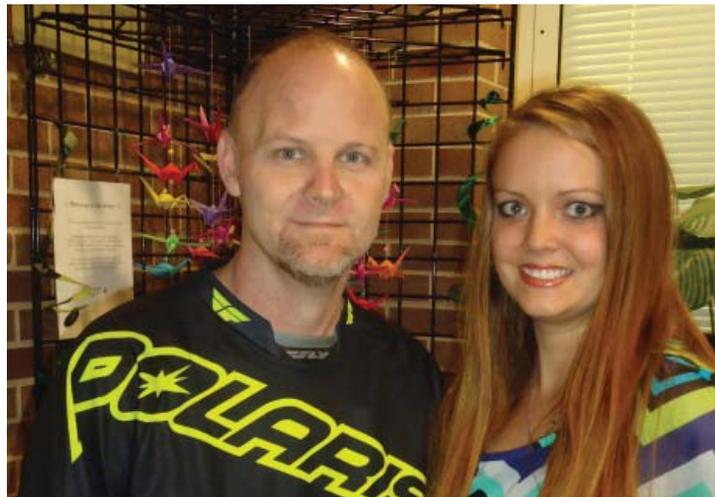
A month later, Lee developed stomach issues. After a series of tests he learned that there were 20 tumors in his small intestine, two in his brain and a couple in his left lung. After two years of removing tumors, cancer treatments and a clinical trial, Lee decided that it was time for a second opinion.

In February 2014, Lee met in Milwaukee with Amin Kassam, MD, George C. Bobustuc, MD, and Kenneth T. Bastin, MD, who would perform his surgery. Dr. Kassam and team were able to extract the tumor from Lee's brain – a tumor that previous physicians told him would be too risky to approach. Lee spent four days in the hospital recovering from the six-hour brain surgery that was performed by removing and reworking his eye socket. After three weeks, he received the go ahead to return home.

"The doctors at Aurora St. Luke's Medical Center cared about what was happening to me and how I was doing.



Dr. Kassam teaches other physicians his expertise through continuing medical education classes. There were dozens of neurosurgeons at the last conference. Many major academic institutions nationally and internationally have attended.



Lee and his girlfriend, Lacey, at Aurora St. Luke's Medical Center

Dr. Bobustuc actually called me to make sure that I made it home alright. That's never happened to me before," said Lee. "I was losing vision in my right eye and couldn't walk because the pressure in my brain was so bad prior to the surgery. A day after the surgery, I could walk again."

"When Lee arrived at Aurora St. Luke's, he couldn't walk and was having difficulty talking. He was walking and talking with his family the next day. The research performed at the Aurora Neuroscience Innovation Institute is immensely necessary. We invest in tomorrow's care because we truly want to change the way we care for conditions and diseases. Our research interests are in cell re-engineering. Our researchers are taking a cell and building a virus that can re-engineer itself into a healthy, non-cancerous cell. Essentially, we want to cure cancer," said Dr. Kassam.

The research focuses on how changes at the cellular level can possibly predict therapeutics for each individual person. Dr. Kassam continued, "It's important to treat the person and not just the cancer because the cancer will usually come back."

Lee knows that all too well as his health care journey continues. The tumors in his lungs and small intestine are shrinking. And he's on a new, more intense treatment for the cancer in his neck. His belief in his doctors is unwavering, "I put my life in their hands and they responded by giving me a life to live. I arrived at Aurora St. Luke's unable to walk and half blind. I walked out myself again," said Lee.

\*Your support of the Aurora Neuroscience Innovation Institute is important. Donor gifts further medical advancements and give people like Lee hope for a cure. To make a gift or learn more, call Maureen Schuerman at 414-649-7892.

# Holly is ready to Tackle Cancer

## This time, on her own two feet



Holly at the 2014 Lombardi Walk to Tackle Cancer, right after she finished chemo. This year, she plans to cross the finish line on her own two feet!

You would never guess, considering the huge smile plastered on her face, but Holly Niemeyer attended the 2014 Lombardi Walk to Tackle Cancer in Oshkosh, just two days after finishing her final chemotherapy treatment. She cheered and carried pom-poms as participants crossed the finish line. At times Holly needed to be pushed in a wheelchair, painted pink by her fiancé, when she was too tired to walk.

What made the event extra special was that Holly wasn't only attending as a patient and survivor, but she was also there to honor her own mother, whom she lost to breast cancer only a month earlier. It was a difficult time, but Holly says she wasn't about to miss it, "I didn't get to do the walk, but I was there to be a cheerleader. To feel all that love, I was on top of the world."

Holly was diagnosed with breast cancer in December of 2013 at the age of 37. Doctors also found cancer in several lymph nodes. She underwent a bilateral mastectomy and some very intense rounds of chemo.

"I just wanted it out of me, I felt like the cancer was eating me. I had two choices and I chose the more aggressive route, because I didn't want to go through this again," Holly explains.

Holly says the Lombardi Walk to Tackle Cancer came at the perfect time for her, because she was able to celebrate the end of her treatment and the memory of her mom with all of her friends, family and even her caregivers. "The walk was celebrating life. It was thanking

my medical team at Aurora Cancer Care for everything they did. They all treated me like I was "Holly". I was never just a patient. They became my friends and supported me throughout my journey," she says.

Holly is getting her team ready to return on June 6; they'll be "Holly's Heroes". She says a Lombardi Walk to Tackle Cancer is the perfect way to honor your loved ones and help other patients like her, "The money stays in your community and helps others become warriors. Plus, Vince Lombardi Cancer Foundation provides a 50% match on all donations. That's really unique compared to other walks. It's a great way to show people you care, and just celebrate life."

\*This year, there are 5 Lombardi Walks to Tackle Cancer in communities near you! Sign up now at [lombardiwalk.org](http://lombardiwalk.org).



## Creating hope for 25 years

Over the last 25 years, Vince Lombardi Cancer Foundation has contributed more than \$18 million to support Aurora Cancer Care and Research. This year, it committed nearly \$2.3 million to support several projects, including:

- \$1 million for Neuro Anatomy Lab at Aurora St. Luke's Medical Center
- \$300,000 for new cancer center in western Racine and Walworth Counties
- \$110,000 for Cancer Nurse Navigator expansion



*"Together, we will keep fighting for better treatment options, more research, greater access to clinical trials and compassionate care for those battling cancer in our community."*

- Brent Morris, Board President of Vince Lombardi Cancer Foundation

# How The Healing Center not only helped Jenny heal, but helped her find her voice

“I would scream all the time. I didn’t think I was being heard, unless I screamed.” Jenny Vang describes the anger and rage she carried with her for most of her life. She had been sexually abused at the age of 7 and saw her own mother get beaten and verbally abused. Jenny had become so accustomed to living with abuse, she didn’t realize how very angry she was.

“I never thought about getting help, the abuse was just a part of me,” Jenny explains. “All of my relationships were the same, bad relationship after bad relationship. There was physical and verbal abuse. I was stuck in this destructive pattern.”

But then in 2008, Jenny read a book by a woman who had been abused. When she finished reading it, she went to a computer and typed in the words “sexual abuse help”, and the search results revealed three words that would change her life forever: **The Healing Center**. The Healing Center is a Well Community program of Aurora Health Care.

“When I first went, I just spilled everything out to the counselor, I cried and cried. She was the first person I had ever shared any of this with, and that day I started feeling better,” Jenny says.

For about a year after she started therapy, Jenny found herself completely exhausted by the process: getting in touch with her past, feeling the anger it provoked and then learning how to cope with it. It took a lot of time and a lot of courage, but she was finally able to leave the abusive relationship she had been in for seven years.

“I just started getting more hope, seeing the light. And it continued to grow after I left the relationship,” Jenny says. She was initially going to The Healing Center twice a week; she now goes once a week. She knows her recovery is still

ongoing, but she has already developed incredible strength. Strength that she hopes can inspire other women, especially in the Hmong community. Jenny requested that we use her last name, Vang, which is one of a handful of last names used in Hmong culture. Jenny wants to set an example for other women like her, who she says struggle in silence.

“There are so many Hmong women who go through abuse and they are afraid to get help. It’s very confidential and under the carpet. There are cultural differences and Hmong traditions, it’s just very hard,” she says. She hopes that sharing her story will make it easier for others to get help.

At The Healing Center, clients are never asked about money. All of their services – counseling, advocacy work, massage therapy, art supplies and more – are free, thanks to donors to Aurora Health Care Foundation. Jenny is incredibly grateful for the expertise of her counselors, and also for the generous donors that have made her healing journey possible. “Money is always an issue. I probably would have done a few sessions and given up because I wouldn’t be able to afford it.”

\*You can support Aurora’s Abuse Response Programs, such as The Healing Center, and help ensure survivors like Jenny continue to get the care and support they need. To make a gift, go to [give.aurora.org/donate](https://give.aurora.org/donate) and click on Abuse Response Services.



Jenny hopes to inspire other Hmong women who have been abused to come out of the shadows and get help.



## Aurora caregivers rally to celebrate survivors like Jenny on Denim Day

Denim Day is internationally recognized as a day to highlight the issue of sexual assault and the injustice of “victim blaming” in our society, by wearing denim. As one of the leading providers of care for survivors of sexual assault, Aurora caregivers were invited to participate in Denim Day on April 29.

Many held signs showing their support. Several

events were also held to raise funds benefiting Aurora’s Abuse Response programs including Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner programs, Sexual Assault Treatment Center, The Healing Center and Safe Mom Safe Baby. You can support these efforts and learn how to be an ambassador for survivors of sexual assault by going to [aurora.org/denimday](https://aurora.org/denimday).



## Gardetto donates \$1 million to support integrative medicine pilot at Aurora Health Care

Chronic health conditions, including hypertension and diabetes, are a major health concern not only here in the United States, but all over the world. They are the root cause of more serious health issues, including hospitalization, amputation, loss of vision and others, especially when symptoms go untreated.

Those health concerns are why Nan Gardetto, Milwaukee businesswoman and member of the Aurora Health Care Board of Directors, has committed a \$1 million gift to help launch an innovative integrative medicine program at Aurora Health Care. The program, called *The Lifestyle Initiative*, aims to help people better manage and prevent chronic health issues. The initiative will focus on people served at 16 Aurora Health Care clinic sites in eastern Wisconsin, and will monitor clinical metrics –such as blood pressure changes, BMI reduction and overall quality of life improvement.

“This commitment to integrative medicine aims to help people lead their best, healthiest lives, while creating a sustainable, expandable care delivery model,” says Gardetto.

A recent survey of 800 Aurora Health Care patients showed that more than half of the respondents were interested in receiving primary care that was holistic and wellness-focused. One out of three of those interested patients shared they would consider switching doctors in order to receive this type of care.

“The Lifestyle Initiative will study the impact of integrative medicine in primary care plans on individuals prone to developing or currently managing chronic health issues,” says Dr. Tiffany Mullen, Medical Director of Integrative Medicine for Aurora Health Care. “This program aims to provide a stronger support team to help individuals recognize symptoms and empower them to better manage their health, with the potential of reversing damage often created by chronic health issues.”

\*This initiative is expected to begin mid-2015. To learn more about integrative medicine at Aurora Health Care, visit [aurora.org/services/integrative-medicine](http://aurora.org/services/integrative-medicine).



Nan Gardetto



Joe and Jennifer Bartolotta

## Gardetto and Bartolottas to co-chair 2015 Aurora Signature Gala

Aurora Health Care Foundation is pleased to announce Nan Gardetto, Milwaukee businesswoman and Aurora Health Care Board Director; and Jennifer and Joe Bartolotta, co-owners of The Bartolotta Restaurants, as co-chairs for the 2015 Aurora Signature Gala. Proceeds from this year’s event benefit Aurora St. Luke’s Medical Center’s efforts to advance medical discovery and provide access to quality care at Aurora Walker’s Point Community Clinic. Both Gardetto and the Bartolottas have strong ties to Aurora St. Luke’s and we are grateful for their commitment to lead this effort.

For tickets, sponsorship or other information, please go to [give.aurora.org/signature](http://give.aurora.org/signature) or call Ron Irwin at 414-219-4755.



# Research could lead to new treatment options for cancer patients

Santhi Konduri, PhD, has had a fascination for research since she was a young girl growing up in India. That's where she got her doctorate in human genetics, and then came to the United States in 1998 and began studying brain tumors. Her passion for research has taken her all over the country, studying brain, pancreatic and breast cancer cells. But along the way she developed a personal connection to her work that continues to motivate her today: Dr. Konduri lost her aunt to breast cancer. "It has happened in my family, and I'm trying to see if this research can help. Will it make a difference for people like her?" she says.

Dr. Konduri received an Aurora Cancer Care Research Award in 2014 for her preclinical evaluation of the drug disulfiram as part of combination therapy in breast and pancreatic cancers.

"Disulfiram is actually an FDA-approved drug for alcoholism, it creates an aversion for alcohol and reverses the inclination to drink. Recently, it has also shown anti-cancer properties, and when it is combined with chemotherapeutic drugs, we can reduce the dosage of such drugs," Dr. Konduri explains. She says this is critical, as reducing the dose will decrease both unpleasant side effects and cellular/organ damage caused by chemotherapy's toxicity.

There are currently only two drugs with FDA approval to treat pancreatic cancer and the survival rates are quite low. "It's a very severe disease, partly because people don't often notice the symptoms until around the 6-month stage. We really need new drug combinations to prolong the lives of these patients," she says.

Dr. Konduri's work is part of a greater Aurora Health Care effort to focus more on research. "Research has become a priority at Aurora, especially with Aurora Research Institute being the recipient of several large, nationally competitive research grants," says Randall Lambrecht, PhD, President of Aurora Research Institute.



Dr. Santhi Konduri looking at cancer cells under a microscope.

Aurora's commitment to research is primarily focused on the areas of cardiovascular medicine, neurosciences and cancer. That research would not be possible without donors to Aurora Health Care Foundation. Dr. Lambrecht believes powerful advancements are right around the corner and notes, "We know that many of tomorrow's breakthroughs in cancer prevention and treatment are waiting to be discovered right here in our research facilities at Aurora."

Donor gifts supported two of Dr. Konduri's projects last year. Those studies are going well and she is seeing promising results. "That's why I am working to get my studies published, so we can show what we're doing. That can lead to more collaborations and hopefully more funding in the future," she explains.

\*You can support Dr. Konduri's work and other research projects taking place at Aurora Research Institute. Go to [give.aurora.org/donate](https://give.aurora.org/donate) and click on "Research" to make a gift. To learn more call Bridgette Frommell at 414-649-3636.

## Aurora Cancer Care Research Awards

Thanks to generous gifts to Aurora Health Care Foundation, Aurora Research Institute awarded grants totaling \$200,000 in 2014 to Aurora Health Care investigators, such as Dr. Santhi Konduri, to advance cancer research. The Aurora Cancer Care Research Award provides support to caregivers conducting advanced research meant to improve patient outcomes and eradicate cancer through cancer detection, treatment, education and prevention. The annual award supports basic, clinical and translational research and is open to all forms of cancer research. The 2015 recipients will be announced in May.



The information presented in this newsletter is intended for general information and educational purposes. It is not intended to replace the advice of your own physician. Contact your physician if you believe you have a health problem. If you would like to be removed from our mailing list, please call Aurora Health Care Foundation at 877-460-8730.  
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## Aurora GOLF Classic



Join us for the Aurora Golf Classic at Chenequa Country Club to raise funds and celebrate the 10th anniversary of Aurora Zilber Family Hospice. If you prefer not to golf, join us later for the reception, a silent auction and dinner.

### Monday, July 20

Golf registration at 9:30 a.m.  
Reception at 5 p.m.

**Chenequa Country Club**  
Hartland

Purchase tickets at  
[give.aurora.org/golfclassic](http://give.aurora.org/golfclassic)

## Calendar of events

Saturday  
**May 16**

### Benefit Ball

Geneva National Golf Club, Lake Geneva  
For more information, go to  
[give.aurora.org/benefitball](http://give.aurora.org/benefitball)

Saturday  
**June 5-6**

### Vince Lombardi Golf Classic

North Hills Country Club, Menomonee Falls  
For more information, go to  
[LombardiFoundation.org](http://LombardiFoundation.org)

Monday  
**July 20**

### Aurora Golf Classic

Chenequa Country Club, Hartland  
For more information, go to  
[give.aurora.org/golfclassic](http://give.aurora.org/golfclassic)

Friday  
**July 31**

### McGMO Charity Golf Event

Delbrook Golf Course, Delavan  
For more information, go to  
[www.mcgmo.com](http://www.mcgmo.com)

Friday  
**August 14**

### Live Well Ozaukee

The Watermark at Shully's, Thiensville  
For more information, go to  
[give.aurora.org/livewellozaukee](http://give.aurora.org/livewellozaukee)

Saturday  
**September 12**

### Aurora Signature Gala

BMO Harris Bradley Center, Milwaukee  
For more information, go to  
[give.aurora.org/signature](http://give.aurora.org/signature)

**HELP US  
TACKLE  
CANCER.**

Support **Aurora Cancer Care** and join a Lombardi Walk near you!

**June 6** Oshkosh

**June 13** Milwaukee (Walk/Run) and Walworth County

**June 20** Kenosha and Green Bay

Register now at [lombardiwalk.org](http://lombardiwalk.org)

