Selena’s journey through breast cancer
How Aurora’s integrative therapies helped her heal
As I sit to write this letter, two sentiments keep filling my mind — “Spring is a time for new beginnings,” and “Hope springs eternal.” This time of year always brings a sense of renewal and hope. We see signs of life returning and a new season begins.

It does feel appropriate to focus much of this issue, and that same energy, on supporting people in their journey of fighting cancer. This is an opportunity for us to provide hope for so many of them, and to help give them that same promise of a new beginning.

One way you can do that is by participating in one of eight Mindful Tri events coming up in June (details are below). This is a new beginning of sorts for Aurora Health Care Foundation, as we try a unique way for you to enhance Aurora Cancer Care programs and services. Think of it like a three-part holistic triathlon but replacing the traditional swimming, biking and running with stretching, walking and various relaxation techniques. What’s especially important is that you get to choose where your dollars make an impact.

I’ve known so many people who faced cancer, including my own loved ones. It’s a diagnosis that disrupts your whole life. Selena, who we feature in our cover story, is a great example of how even a very early diagnosis can be a stressful, painful experience. That’s why I’m so grateful for the services Aurora provides that help treat the whole person – physically, emotionally and spiritually.

I want to thank donors like you who have enhanced this care for so many years. You have helped to find new therapies, provide a healing touch and so much more. I’m looking forward to spreading hope with you this June at a Mindful Tri event!

Sincerely,

Cristy Garcia-Thomas
Chief External Affairs Officer, Advocate Aurora Health and President, Aurora Health Care Foundation

Join us for a “Mindful Tri” against cancer this June!

A MINDFUL TRI AGAINST CANCER

Saturday, June 2 - Germantown and Oshkosh
Saturday, June 9 - Kenosha and Sheboygan
Saturday, June 16 - Grafton and Williams Bay
Saturday, June 23 - Milwaukee and Summit

Sign up today and learn more at AuroraMindfulTri.org.

Come explore activities such as tai chi, an empowerment walk and various relaxation techniques that reflect the important role integrative medicine can play for those diagnosed with cancer. What’s especially unique is YOU get to choose where your money goes: your local Aurora Cancer Care clinic, research efforts or to enhance integrative medicine services like acupuncture and massage therapy. It’s free to participate and 100 percent of all donations support the cause.
Selena’s journey through breast cancer

In some ways, Selena Barner was really fortunate. Her breast cancer, which was discovered in May of 2017 thanks to her yearly mammogram, was caught very early. In fact, it was considered stage “zero.” But Selena’s cancer journey is a reminder that no matter how early in the process someone hears the words “You have cancer,” those words still fall like a weight, and the journey can still be painful.

“At one point, I had five different doctors or specialists on my team,” explained Selena, who was treated at the Aurora Cancer Care clinic in Grafton. “They help you stay on top of things, but cancer is just overwhelming.”

Selena did not need chemotherapy, but she did have lumpectomy surgery in June of 2017 and had to endure 30 radiation treatments that left the skin around her breast and underarm feeling tight and extremely sunburned. Her cancer also impacted other pre-existing medical conditions, which led her to have a hysterectomy in October of 2017.

Something that brought Selena some much needed respite were the integrative therapies offered to her at the cancer clinic. Many times at a radiation appointment she was offered a free massage; she also took advantage of the free Reiki sessions as well. Reiki is a healing technique that uses touch but is much less invasive than a massage. Selena said Reiki helped her relax and calm her mind during a very stressful time.

“They were so kind and it just felt like something magical was happening,” she explained. “I wanted them to come to my house, I wanted them to come to my work, I wanted them to come wherever I was when I felt like I needed to rest.”

Thankfully, Selena’s cancer is now in remission! She wanted to share her story to remind women about the importance of getting a yearly mammogram and to encourage others to support these integrative therapies, however you can.

“I would recommend these services to anyone who’s looking to ease their mind. That’s what they did for me.”

The Reiki was so relaxing, Selena is going to continue the sessions even though her cancer is in remission.
Giving in memory, or in honor, of a loved one

Why Susie gives: To keep Michael’s memory alive

Susie Balcerek has given through Inspire in memory of her late husband, Michael, who passed away in 2007 at the age of 59. They lived in Racine but Michael was treated for cancer, and the many complications that came with it, at Aurora St. Luke’s Medical Center. It’s also where Susie worked as a nurse for over 25 years.

“That was my hospital,” she explained. “We were both so grateful for how smart and efficient all his doctors were.”

Michael was first diagnosed with cancer in 2000 when a lesion was discovered on his femur. But that ended up being a spot that doctors believed had metastasized from his lung. Over the next seven years, cancer would be found in his lung, near his heart and eventually his brain. He endured many rounds of chemotherapy, radiation and several surgeries. Though he lost his battle, Susie continues to support the cancer programs at Aurora St. Luke’s as a way to keep Michael’s memory alive and to express her gratitude for his care.

“His oncologist was such a godsend and everyone he referred us to was so wonderful,” Susie shared. “I believe that’s one way to give back to people who are going through it now. I think it would make Mike happy.”

Why Cyndi walks: In memory of her dad

Cyndi Walsh was 37 years old when her father was diagnosed with cancer. He fought hard and survived for eight months.

“He always kept his sense of humor,” she recalled. “I once asked him if he had any regrets and he said, ‘I’m never going to collect my social security.’” He was 64.

Cyndi's son was 36 when his father, her ex-husband, got the same news. He lived for nine months after his diagnosis. He was just 59.

Her father and her son are the reasons Cyndi is so passionate about leading a team every year at the fundraising walk to support Aurora Cancer Care in Williams Bay.

“My team is called Charlie’s Angels. Charlie was a nickname given to me by my ex-husband, and my angels are the women who walk with me who have all been touched by cancer in one way or another,” she explained. “Unfortunately, we’re honoring someone’s memory more often than we’re supporting survivors.”

She’s determined to change that. Charlie’s Angels will be back this June for the Aurora Mindful Tri in Williams Bay.

“I walk for my dad; he’s always with me in spirit. I walk for my son; I walk for the future, and I walk for a cure,” Cyndi said.
Vince Lombardi Cancer Foundation gives close to half a million dollars to support local cancer technology, research

In April, Vince Lombardi Cancer Foundation officially announced a $420,000 gift to support Aurora Cancer Care programs and services, including Aurora’s NanoKnife® system. Aurora St. Luke’s Medical Center recently became the first hospital in Wisconsin to offer this surgical technology for cancer patients, thanks to the Foundation’s support.

“This tool allows us to perform some of the most advanced surgery in cancer care to date, and we are grateful to have this available right here in Wisconsin,” said James Weese, MD, vice president of Aurora Cancer Care. “Vince Lombardi Cancer Foundation remains one of our largest donors. We look forward to continuing to build on the strong relationship we have developed over the years.”

The NanoKnife® system is a minimally invasive option for patients with inoperable or difficult-to-reach tumors. The system uses electrical currents to pinpoint and destroy cancerous tumors without open incisions, causing less damage to healthy tissue, and ultimately leading to fewer side effects, less time in the hospital and a faster recovery.

“Vince Lombardi Cancer Foundation is dedicated to winning the battle against cancer by funding advancements in research and technology,” said Benjamin R. Haas, president, Vince Lombardi Cancer Foundation. “We look forward to continuing efforts alongside a growing health care provider that is committed to innovation to help prevent, treat and cure cancer.”

Additionally, the Lombardi Foundation will sponsor Aurora's Team Phoenix program in 2018. The program trains more than 30 cancer survivors annually to compete in a local triathlon. The gift will also support a key breast cancer genetic marker study through the Translational Oncology Research Quest for Understanding & Exploration (TORQUE) program. To learn more about how you can strengthen Aurora Cancer Care programs and services, visit give.aurora.org/cancer.

How Aurora Family Service treats cancer holistically

Cancer treatment is tough. Often times, treatments delivered in clinics, like intravenous chemotherapy, are administered in rooms large enough for several people. It’s an arrangement that can help patients see that they’re not alone.

But seeing is not necessarily believing. Patients may feel hopeless, alone and depressed no matter who or what they see.

“Cancer treatment can be as emotionally draining as it is physically draining. Even medications intended to stop the cancer from spreading can cause depressive symptoms,” said Rob Marrs, who oversees Aurora Family Service’s family support specialists. These specialists are trained to provide unique, chairside counseling to patients in these group treatment rooms.

“We’ve seen an incredible response from these patients,” said Marrs. “That’s why our specialists travel to eight clinics from Kenosha to Grafton.”

Research has shown that addressing behavioral health alongside physical health can greatly improve outcomes. That’s why these counseling services, currently supported by philanthropy, have been thoroughly integrated into the treatment model at these clinics. Donors like you can help expand these essential services. In fact, Marrs hopes to eventually include financial counseling specialists, too.

“Our three full-time counselors are very dedicated, but more resources will help more people,” Marrs said. “And we want to help as many people as we can.”

To find out how you can support this critical service, as well as other services provided by Aurora Family Service, please contact Cindy Hosale at cynthia.hosale@aurora.org.
Why helping others manage their pain means so much to Alicia Smith McCants

Alicia Smith and Edison McCants were high school sweethearts. They stayed friends after high school and found their way back to each other in 2010. Alicia was aware that Edison had something called paraganglioma, which is a rare form of cancer that causes tumors around the head, neck and spine. Several surgeries had left Edison with chronic severe back pain.

“I taught a dance class and he started coming with me. It was a way to help distract him from the pain and he enjoyed learning new things,” Alicia, who is also an Aurora team member, explained.

Over time, Edison’s health deteriorated and he relied on palliative and hospice care from Aurora at Home. Alicia and other family members were trained by Aurora at Home team members to assist Edison with certain aspects of his care like treating wounds and administering medication. But over time, as he transitioned to hospice, his care plan went from treating the pain to simply providing comfort.

Lori Cook was Edison’s Aurora at Home nurse. “You just want them to be as comfortable as possible. That’s so hard, not just for him, but for his family, too,” Lori shared.

Edison passed away in 2012. Alicia has kept his legacy alive with the Aurora at Home Edison McCants Comfort Fund. Dollars are used to further train Aurora at Home team members on the best therapeutic methods for pain management. In late 2017, Alicia was able to attend one of the trainings and see firsthand how engaged and grateful the nurses were.

“Lori and those nurses are the reason why we do this,” Alicia explained. “It is because of the way she infused herself into our lives at a time when I needed her most. I know Edison is super proud of the work we are doing in his name.”

Aurora team members like Lori and Alicia make a difference every day in the lives of our patients, but also in our communities. If you’re interested in joining Aurora’s team, you can learn more at aurora.org/careers.

How you can get to “stepping” and support this effort!

In 2014, Alicia and her friend, Cynthia Wilson, founders of Milwaukee Steppers and Ballroomers United, teamed up to create the fundraising event Stepping with the Stars to support the Aurora at Home Edison McCants Comfort Fund. To date, they have raised over $70,000 in support of this effort.

“Alicia is one of my best friends, so Edison referred to me as ‘Wife 1.5,’” Cynthia shared. “I had wanted to do this event for many years. When Edison passed away it was only fitting we make it happen in his honor. We also celebrate the memory of my father, Horthy Viverette, Sr., who fought a tough battle against cancer as well.”

You can join the fun and support the 5th annual Stepping with the Stars in Milwaukee on June 3. Go to give.aurora.org/stepping to learn more.
We need YOU to help fill the gap for people like Myriah!

In 2013, Myriah Mundt worked at a senior living community in Port Washington. She often had to lift patients and eventually injured her back. The initial treatment consisted of a lot of physical therapy and painkillers. “My then-fiancé was using drugs,” Myriah said. “And he took all my medications. So I started using with him.”

She eventually had a multi-level fusion performed on her spine. This meant more painkillers. Her fiancé stole those, too. As time went on, Myriah was also using heroin and cocaine.

Now a healthy 30-year-old, Myriah said she wasn’t “in a good mindset” back then. She’d been a heavy drinker for a long time and wasn’t prepared to recognize that her relationship was destructive and that she was stuck in the middle between her partner and drug abuse. “I felt like I was locked in an emotional cage and I didn’t have a key,” she said.

But then Myriah found the key to it all: the Dewey Center, on the Aurora Behavioral Health campus in Wauwatosa. She spent 21 days in the Dewey Center’s partial hospitalization program, where she learned that her addiction is nothing to be ashamed of.

“All the caregivers at the Dewey Center treated me with kindness, respect and love,” Myriah said.

People suffering from substance abuse are just that: people. They could be your attorney, your mechanic, your organic farmer. They’re Myriah, a young woman who’s been to the bottom and come out on top to pay it forward.

“I’ve been sober for 18 months. I want to tell my story,” Myriah insisted. “And I want people to know that I would not have made it this far without the Dewey Center.”

The Renew, Restore, Rebuild campaign is a $1.5 million fundraising effort to strengthen Aurora Behavioral Health Services’ substance abuse and recovery programs. It will include enhancements to a newly constructed Dewey Center that consolidates inpatient and outpatient addiction services in one modernized facility. Construction of the new Culver Alumni House is already complete.
Organizations listed above do not endorse or support any of the service providers or products listed on this site.

The information presented in this magazine 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.

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**Calendar of events**

**Saturday**

**May 12**

Benefit Ball
Geneva National Golf Club, Lake Geneva
Go to give.aurora.org/benefitball

**Sunday**

**June 3**

Stepping with the Stars
Potawatomi Hotel and Casino, Milwaukee
Go to give.aurora.org/stepping

**Friday**

**July 27**

McGMO Charity Golf Outing
Delbrook Golf Course, Delavan
Go to www.mcgmo.com

**Friday**

**August 17**

Live Well Ozaukee
River Club of Mequon, Mequon
Go to give.aurora.org/livewellozaukee

**Save the Date: Aurora Gala - September 8, 2018**

Join us in September for our largest annual event celebrating new and leading innovations at Aurora Health Care that transform patient care, build community and help more people live well. Go to give.aurora.org/gala to purchase a ticket, become a sponsor or learn more!

**Sunday, June 24 • 1 to 4 p.m.**

Aurora Zilber Family Hospice, Wauwatosa

Join us to celebrate the memory of your loved one by releasing beautiful butterflies. With a gift of $30, you will receive a butterfly. The memorial will include music and light refreshments. Proceeds benefit Aurora Zilber Family Hospice and Home Hospice Care. To purchase a butterfly or learn more, go to give.aurora.org/butterfly.