

Remembering Nancy

A \$6 million gift to help the University of Michigan Comprehensive Cancer Center become the leader in thyroid cancer clinical research

THEY CALLED HER PUNYA.

A derivative of the Polish word for “Mrs.,” Jim Wigginton’s nickname for his wife, Nancy, became an effortless term of endearment among their family and friends. She and Jim were married in 1968, and over the next 45 years, Nancy became the dedicated matriarch of the Wigginton family. She was a master gardener with an eye for antiques. She traveled the world with her husband during summers off from her job with West Bloomfield School District, and she enjoyed close relationships with their three children and nine grandchildren.

“She was the soul of our family,” Jim says. “She was a giving, caring and compassionate person, and she always put everyone else first — even after she got sick.”

In 2007, Nancy was diagnosed with advanced thyroid cancer, the eighth most common cancer in the United States and the fifth most common cancer in women. Most patients have an excellent prognosis. However, patients often do poorly in cases like Nancy’s when the cancer has spread, particularly if patients are over the age of 45, says Megan Haymart, M.D., an assistant professor of internal medicine at the University of Michigan, who specializes in endocrinology.

Under the care of Haymart and Fran-



cis Worden, M.D., associate professor of medical oncology, Nancy enrolled in various cancer studies at the U-M. She joined a thyroid cancer support group

Clockwise from top: Joyce Wigginton; Joyce and Jim Wigginton as newlyweds; and, in later years, at a wedding

in Ann Arbor and became a guiding presence of hope and comfort among the members. She told Jim it was important for her to use her experience to help them — and anyone else living with thyroid cancer. It was a mission Jim chose to continue after Nancy passed away in the summer of 2013.

“We lived with cancer for seven years and for quite a while, we were lucky to have a normal quality of life,” Jim says. “But there came a point when she couldn’t do the things she loved anymore. My thought was that everyone is focusing on trying to cure cancer, but why not try for something more achievable? Why don’t we put some money into [helping patients] live longer, healthier lives with less side effects? I asked Dr. Worden how much money it would take to significantly improve life expectancy and quality of life for thyroid cancer patients. He took some time to look into this and then told me \$10 million. So that is my mission: figure out how to come up with \$10 million.”

In August 2013, Jim, a current resident of Belleville, Michigan, and a managing partner in True North Equity, LLC, established the Punya Thyroid Cancer Endowed Fund with a gift of \$1 million. He will donate another \$5 million to establish the Nancy Wigginton Professorships of Thyroid Cancer in the divisions of hematology/oncology and endocrinology within the Department of Internal Medicine to honor Worden and Haymart, respectively. He is dedicated to raising the remaining \$4 million with additional gifts and fundraising events. Worden and Haymart envision the Punya Thyroid Cancer Endowed

Fund as a comprehensive, collaborative clinical research program that will advance understanding in the field and improve the standard of patient care. They hope to explore the rise in the incidence of thyroid cancer, as well as its implications for survival and quality of life.

“A diagnosis of thyroid cancer is often associated with a worsening quality of life, increased patient costs and occasionally treatment complications,” Worden says. “It is important for patients with advanced thyroid cancer to have treatment options readily available to them and to have a team of caregivers who are trained to manage these complex patients. Only through trials with novel agents can we improve survival. Support from the Punya Thyroid Cancer Endowed Fund will allow the University of Michigan to become a leader in both thyroid cancer health services research and thyroid cancer clinical trials.”

Jim, who shares this vision, praises Nancy’s care providers for their collaborative relationships within and outside the U-M and says he feels confident that they will ensure his gift impacts as many patients and families as possible. And, by making that impact in Nancy’s name, he hopes others will come to know her generous spirit and compassionate life.

“She was just one of those energetic, happy, loving, kind people,” he says. “If you met her once you’d never forget. So, she really did personally what I am trying to do financially. I know that she wanted to make a difference, and now, through this fund, she can help others forever.” — Allison Wilson

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A Gift from the Heart

Grateful couple provides support for cardiovascular research and treatment at the University of Michigan

THE DIAGNOSIS DIDN'T SIT

well with George Helms. “A-fib,” a common cardiac arrhythmia, he was told, was “just something he was going to have to live with.” He could manage it by taking medication and getting regular blood check-ups. But, knowing the condition could increase his risk of stroke and other complications, George and his wife, Joyce, hoped for a more proactive approach to treatment that could help ensure many more years of golf and travel and quality time with their two children.

That’s when a friend recommended George visit Arman Chugh, M.D., associate professor of internal medicine and an electrophysiologist at the University of Michigan. After what Joyce describes as a refreshing and honest consultation with Chugh, George underwent a successful ablation procedure. He then began follow-up care with Melvyn Rubenfire, M.D., a professor of internal medicine at U-M, who specializes in preventive cardiology. Impressed by the care George received and grateful for a more positive outlook on managing A-fib, the couple expressed their gratitude through a series of gifts totalling \$1 million to the Samuel & Jean Frankel Cardiovascular Center.

“I consider myself to be very blessed, and I have a responsibility to give back,” says George, who today enjoys a healthy and busy lifestyle as chairman and chief executive officer of Advance Engineering, an industrial metal stamping services company. “My own experience at the



George and Joyce Helms

U-M was outstanding, and my thought was to give to research, where there’s a long-term return on investment, and it will help a generation of people who have cardiovascular issues.”

George and Joyce’s vision to impact future generations of patients motivated them to designate a major portion of their gift to the Melvyn Rubenfire Professorship in Preventive Cardiology. In addition to honoring Rubenfire’s legacy, the gift provides ongoing financial support that will allow a U-M faculty member to focus on the development of preventive cardiology programs, clinical care, research and education.

“We’ve learned that the preventive end of cardiology is such an important aspect of good heart care,” says Joyce, “and that’s something that Dr. Rubenfire really endorses.”

The couple has also given to other research areas of the Medical School such as prostate cancer. In addition to providing financial support for the U-M, George joined the Frankel Cardiovascular Center Campaign Council and the UMHS Campaign Council last fall. Joyce says she and her husband feel privileged to play a role in the U-M’s work to improve cardiac research and care.

“George and I consider the University of Michigan Health System to be one of the best in the world,” she says. “It has provided our extended family with years of great comfort and healing. We are so personally grateful and impressed at how they handled his situation and at how we know they will help others. We can’t really say enough about the trust we have in the U-M.”

— Allison Wilson

Fall 2014 Professorships Recently Inaugurated

Endowed professorships are among the highest honors the University of Michigan Medical School awards to our faculty. These professorships, often made possible by the generosity of private individuals and foundations, honor the groundbreaking work that our faculty members pursue — in the name of education, patient care and research. Below is a list of professorships inaugurated from January through September 2014. Expanded descriptions are online at: medicineatmichigan.org/magazine.

The **Moshe Talpaz, M.D., Professorship in Translational Oncology** was inaugurated during a Jan. 15 ceremony recognizing Talpaz as a pioneer in the quest to understand, treat and ultimately cure chronic myeloid leukemia. **Pavan Reddy, M.D. (Fellowship 2001)**, was installed as its first professor. Talpaz, the Alexander J. Trotman Professor of Leukemia Research, will continue his research, expanding the U-M Comprehensive Cancer Center's efforts in hematologic cancer.

On Feb. 6, **Oren Sagher, M.D.**, became the first **William F. Chandler Collegiate Professor of Neurosurgery**. Chandler (M.D. 1971, Residency 1977) was honored for his contributions as an internationally recognized neurosurgeon, and his expertise in the surgical management of pituitary diseases as a member of the endocrinology fellowship training program in the Department of Internal Medicine and co-director of the Pituitary and Neuroendocrine Center.

Three **Frederick G.L. Huetwell Professorships in Cardiovascular Medicine** were inaugurated on March 6 as a result of funds generated from an estate gift from Huetwell. Huetwell was a great friend to the U-M and to the Medical School, and one of the university's leading benefactors. The Huetwell professors include **Eugene Chen, M.D., Ph.D.**; **Kenneth Jamerson (M.D. 1986, Residency 1989, Fellowship 1990)**; and **Daniel Lawrence, Ph.D.**

The **Gerald D. Abrams Collegiate Pro-**

fessorship honors Abram's five-decade commitment to medical education. Abrams (M.D. 1955, Residency 1957) has educated more than 10,000 graduates of the Medical School and these former students, along with residents, donated to establish the professorship. On March 26, **Andrew Lieberman, M.D., Ph.D.**, professor of pathology and director of the Neuropathy Fellowship Program, was installed as the first Abrams professor.

On April 3, two professorships were inaugurated to honor **Richard C. Schneider, M.D. (Residency 1948)**, who was on the U-M faculty for nearly 40 years, including 10 years as the head of the section of neurosurgery. **Pedro Lowenstein, M.D., Ph.D.**, was installed as the **Richard Schneider Collegiate Professor of Neurosurgery**, and **Maria Castro, Ph.D.**, was installed as the **R.C. Schneider Collegiate Professor of Neurosurgery**.

The **James Douglas Engel Collegiate Professorship** was established in honor of Engel's significant contributions to the Department of Cell and Developmental Biology, the Medical School and the U-M. The first recipient of the professorship, **Deborah Gumucio (Ph.D. 1986)**, professor and interim chair in the Department of Cell and Developmental Biology, was inaugurated on April 17.

The **Godfrey Dorr Stobbe Professorship in Research** was inaugurated during a ceremony on May 12, when **Nicholas Lukacs, Ph.D.** was installed as

the first recipient. This is the third professorship honoring the legacy of Stobbe (M.D. 1939), who demonstrated his life-long commitment with the generous gift of his entire estate. His bequest also resulted in the **Godfrey D. Stobbe Endowed Professorship in Pathology**, established in 1987, and the **Godfrey D. Stobbe Professorship in Pathology Education**, established in 1995.

On June 5, **Albert Rocchini, M.D.**, was installed as the first **Macdonald Dick II, M.D. Research Professorship in Pediatrics and Communicable Diseases**. Dick has long been a devoted steward of the Cardiology Fellowship Training Program at Michigan, and the professorship recognizes his proven excellence in teaching, mentorship to cardiology fellows and dedicated service to the U-M.

Honoring a career that has launched quality improvement initiatives across the state of Michigan in acute myocardial infarction, heart failure, coronary angioplasty and the fight against childhood obesity, the **Kim A. Eagle, M.D. Endowed Professorship in Cardiovascular Medicine** was inaugurated on Sept. 12. The first Eagle professor, **Vallerie McLaughlin, M.D. (Residency 1992)**, is the director of Pulmonary Hypertension Program at U-M.

The **Ray and Ruth Anderson-Laurence M. Sprague Memorial Research Professorship** was formally established during a ceremony on Sept. 23. **Muneesh Tewari, M.D., Ph.D.**, is the first recipient of the professorship, which will contribute to ongoing research in the Division of Hematology/Oncology and honors Ruth Jordan Anderson and Ray Anderson, who received a degree from the U-M in 1924 and considers his time spent at the university the happiest years of his life. The fund also honors Ruth Anderson's uncle, Laurence M. Sprague, who earned his undergraduate degree at Michigan in 1914 and a law degree in 1916.