

Southlake raises millions at Gala to ensure 'Cancer Meets its Match'

Cancer will continue to meet its match at Southlake Regional Health Centre after the hospital's 2022 gala raised more than \$3.5 million to advance cancer care in York Region and South Simcoe.

The October event was the kick-off to the local hospital's \$20 million 'Here's Where Cancer Meets Its Match' campaign, which aims to expand care throughout the hospital's catchment area with the purchase of advanced equipment, the expansion of pharmacological services, and expanding its complement of chemotherapy chairs from 23 to 42.

To date, the community has funded 13 of the needed chairs - many of which were auctioned off at the October event.

'We've doubled anything we've done before with this gala,' says Peter Van Schaik, who co-chairs Southlake's Philanthropy Cabinet alongside Aurora's Steve Hinder. 'With COVID in between [galas] it was nice to see how the community really came together like it used to.'

Van Schaik has been involved with Southlake for many years, spearheading the previous capital campaign which ultimately resulted in the Stronach Regional Cancer Centre at Southlake.

Since its foundation, the Centre has kept pace with a growing community, but with significant further growth on the horizon, it needs more helping hands to meet anticipated demand, and that's where the new capital campaign comes in.

'Cancer touches everybody,' says Lesley Ring, Vice President, Major Gifts and Campaign, for the Southlake Foundation. 'As our community continues to grow and expand, we have this absolute jewel in the crown with the Stronach Regional Cancer Centre that our community rallied, our community built, and now we have to ensure it stays at that level and continues to service the community as the community grows. Because you're making progress against cancer all the time with advances in research, we want to make sure that our citizens have access to leading-edge cancer care. For us, it is bringing the first PET/CT to the Region. It's going to be a gamechanger for cancer diagnoses.'

Adds Jennifer Klotz-Ritter, President & CEO of the Southlake Foundation: 'Nearly two in five Canadians are going to be diagnosed with cancer [and as] the Stronach Regional Cancer Centre serves the northern GTA, York Region, and South Simcoe, that's a lot of people. It is an exceptional institution at Southlake that cares for our growing communities and also our aging communities, which is one of the leading indicators of cancer.'

As the community ages, so is the equipment at Centre. Growth in the community is also keeping pace with age, making additional equipment and expanded care, service, and capacity paramount.

Cancer cases are also presenting in more complex ways than ever before, they add, with COVID playing a factor, with some treatments being delayed or patients being fearful of coming in for treatment while the virus was raging.

'Think of someone who would have had a series of regular screenings, mammograms and so forth. They may have had their cancer detected early and maybe that meant they just had to have a course of radiation and that would have been the duration of their cancer journey with us,' says Ring. 'Now because things are much more advanced, maybe it's radiation to shrink a tumour so it can then have a surgical response and then into chemotherapy. The demands on our system become that much greater. We want to be able to prepare for that so we can manage our wait times and the additional demands on Southlake.'

It is also paramount to ensure that these vital services are available to patients close to home.

No one, says Klotz-Ritter, should have to travel away from their community when they are so ill - particularly if cancer treatment elsewhere will take the individual away from their support systems.

'That they should have to travel for care is simply unacceptable,' she says. 'As a community, we are coming together to say we don't want them to have to do that. We don't want their families, who are also impacted when somebody is on the journey to fight their cancer, to be burdened and have additional stress. [At the gala], the community answered the call to action to say, 'Nobody should have to travel to get the care that they need and deserve,' and I think that is quite remarkable.

'Healthcare is a partnership and it is a partnership between the province, hospital and community. It takes a village to deliver leading-edge care, and our community repeatedly steps up to be a part of that partnership and ensure that across the communities we serve in the catchment everybody is receiving the very best care. We take that as our responsibility. I think it is that partnership we're emphasizing among province, hospital and communities to ensure that everyone in our communities has access to leading-edge care right here close to home.'

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