

# centerpoint

Yale Cancer Center's community newsletter summer 2006

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



Diagnosed with stage IV head and neck cancer in 2004, Debbi Zergiebel has a renewed outlook on life as a cancer survivor.

## A Chance Discovery and the Road to Recovery

If it wasn't for a motorcycle ride in the fall of 2003, Debbi Zergiebel might not be here today.

It was a windy day when Debbi, 46, set out with her husband Kent for a ride near their home in Hamden, CT. She was in good health but after the bike ride, she was bothered by an earache and decided to have it checked out by an ENT specialist. He diagnosed an ear infection, but also noticed a very small lump behind her right ear. Debbi was unconcerned about the lump because it had been there since she was a child and had never grown. However, when her doctor insisted on an X-ray, she acquiesced.

The lump turned out to be a tumor, but still no alarm bells sounded because she had no symptoms, no pain, and no weight loss. The tumor was a parotid (salivary duct) tumor, a type which is benign in the vast majority of cases. Still, it needed to be removed. Debbi works in the Department of Protective Services at Yale-New Haven Hospital and decided to consult with Dr. Clarence Sasaki, MD, FACS, a surgeon specializing in otolaryngology and Director of the Head and Neck Cancer Program at Yale Cancer Center. Around

Thanksgiving he examined her, ordered a series of tests, and scheduled surgery. Because Debbi's favorite time of year is the holiday season, she asked if the surgery could wait until January. Since the tumor was highly unlikely to be malignant, Sasaki agreed.

When Debbi entered the hospital for surgery on January 8, 2004, both she and her husband thought the procedure would be routine. Kent was surprised when his parents arrived for moral support as he waited for news. The hours dragged on as what was supposed to be a three hour operation lasted more than six hours. When Sasaki told Kent that the

tumor was cancerous, Kent's mother likened it to someone being punched in the stomach; he crumpled into a chair and couldn't speak,

"You don't fully understand what tired is until putting one foot in front of the other is just a chore."

Debbi Zergiebel

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## Lifestyle Factors and Cancer Researchers Study How We Live

Popular wisdom holds that eating well, staying active, and maintaining a healthy weight are the keys to good health, but there is growing evidence that lifestyle factors can also play an important role in fighting cancer.

Researchers at Yale Cancer Center have been studying the connection between cancer, diet, physical activity, and obesity to find out what their interplay can teach us about cancer prevention and treatment. For example, studies conducted at Yale have shown that diet can have an impact on cancer. One study found that both obesity and diet were strong predictors of esophageal cancer risk and that fruit and vegetable intake had a protective effect on this type of cancer. "It's a finding we come up with in many, many studies of various cancers," said Susan Mayne, PhD, Associate Director for Population Sciences at Yale Cancer Center and a Professor of Epidemiology and Public Health. Unraveling the reasons why a particular cancer is increasing or how lifestyle choices may be risk factors for cancer is a complicated undertaking because the results often rely on people's recollection of eating or activity habits, which may or may not be precisely correct. One way around this is to focus on objective indicators of nutritional status and physical activity, projects that are currently underway at Yale. For example, researchers are evaluating a new technology to measure nutrient levels in skin

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## Yale-New Haven is Ranked Among the Best

U.S. News & World Report has recognized Yale-New Haven Hospital in its annual ranking of "America's Best Hospitals." Ranked in 10 of 16 specialties, Yale-New Haven ranked 26 for cancer services among the best cancer centers in the nation.

## New York Magazine Honors Members of Yale Cancer Center

Yale Cancer Center is proud to announce that thirty-two of its members were named top doctors in *New York Magazine's* Best Doctors issue, June 12, 2006.

[newyorkmetro.com/bestdoctors](http://newyorkmetro.com/bestdoctors)

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Yale Cancer Center's quarterly newsletter is written to inform the public and the Center's friends, volunteers, donors, and staff on current items of interest at Yale Cancer Center. All inquiries should be addressed to Renee Gaudette, Director of Public Affairs and Marketing, 157 Church Street, New Haven, CT 06510-2100. Yale Cancer Center complies with the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) of 1996.



LARRY THOMPSON

Dennis Brown, Fairfield, CT

## 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 second annual event will take place in Fairfield, CT on August 27th and all proceeds raised will directly support the Connecticut Challenge Survivorship Clinic at Yale Cancer Center, which is scheduled to open this fall.

The National Cancer Institute estimates that there are over 10 million cancer survivors in the United States. The new clinic will provide screening for long-term consequences resulting from cancer treatment and information to help survivors minimize or avoid future health concerns.

Please consider riding in the Connecticut Challenge in honor of a loved one with cancer or to support cancer survivors throughout Connecticut. To participate in the 25, 50, or 100 mile bike ride, please register through the Connecticut Challenge website. Volunteers are also needed. If you would like to make a donation in support of Team Yale Cancer Center or Team Yale Pediatrics you can give online or by mail to the Connecticut Challenge, PO Box 566, Southport, CT 06890. ☺

[ctchallenge.org](http://ctchallenge.org)



### "Why I Ride..."

"I am at an age where more and more of my friends, or their young children, are facing the challenges of cancer. The CT Challenge is my small way of fighting back. Three out of four families will be affected by this horrible disease, and a center dedicated to the special needs of cancer survivors is essential. Yale Cancer Center has a vision of building a world class facility in our home state and the Connecticut Challenge gives the people of the state the opportunity to bring their vision to reality."

Dennis Brown  
Fairfield, CT

## Dr. Mel Celebrates with Cancer Survivors

Attending his ninth annual Cancer Survivors Day at Yale Cancer Center as Master of Ceremonies, Dr. Mel Goldstein, meteorologist on WTNH News Channel 8, greeted over 150 cancer survivors and their families for an afternoon of workshops and a picnic in celebration of cancer survivorship. Cancer Survivors Day at Yale Cancer Center, titled *New Beginnings: Complementary Approaches to Living Well Today*, invited guests to attend one of three workshops: *Guided Imagery*, *Food for Life*, and *Walking in our Patients' Shoes: The Role of Empathy in Medicine*.

Following the workshops, the guests and their families joined Yale Cancer Center physicians, nurses, and staff for the afternoon picnic on the lawn of Harkness Terrace. Always an inspiration to other cancer survivors, Dr. Mel spoke and welcomed David Brown to the podium, a prostate cancer survivor who shared his positive outlook on life following his diagnosis of cancer. ☺



JERRY DOMIAN



Cancer survivors look forward to the annual Cancer Survivors Day picnic with Dr. Mel Goldstein, a ten year cancer survivor of multiple myeloma.

### ► **Chance Discovery** continued from page 1

even to relay the devastating news to his parents. Even though she had seemed perfectly fine going into surgery, Debbi was very ill.

Dr. Sasaki and surgeon, Dr. Douglass Ross, MD, FACS, who also specializes in otolaryngology, had to make an incision that began from behind the top of Debbi's right ear, traveled behind the ear, and extended to underneath the middle of her chin in order to remove the mass. Although the tumor was encapsulated, it had wrapped itself around Debbi's carotid artery. Dr. Sasaki performed a mastoidectomy (removing a small portion of Debbi's skull behind her ear) to ensure that the malignancy had not reached her brain. In addition, her surgeons had to sacrifice a facial nerve and graft a new nerve from the top of her ear into place. At first, it looked as if she had suffered a stroke because the right side of her face had completely relaxed, but with time the nerve regenerated and pulled her facial muscles back into position. "If you saw me now you would never know I had facial surgery," Debbi said, adding that the scar is hardly visible.

Looking back, Debbi remembers not only her own surprise at her diagnosis, but the reaction of the physicians who treated her as well. Shortly after surgery she went with Dr. Sasaki before the head and neck tumor board to discuss her case. "One question all of the physicians asked was if I had any pain," she recalled. "I had zero pain."

Debbi spent three weeks recuperating from the surgery, before beginning radiation treatment under the care of radiation oncologist Dr. Yung

Sun. The therapy involved 31 treatments spread out over more than six weeks. Incredibly, she continued working throughout the radiation treatment, although she felt tired, especially toward the end. "You don't fully understand what tired is until putting one foot in front of the other is just a chore," she said. "The love and support I received from my husband, my sister Anita, and the rest of my family, as well as friends and co-workers, was very instrumental in my recovery," Debbi explained.

An eternal optimist, Debbi's outlook on life is better than ever. "I've always been a happy person, but I've got to say, I'm happier now," she said. A little over a year ago, Debbi joined a support group formed by Shelley Jolie, RN, BSN, Nurse Coordinator and Mary Crooks, MSW, LCSW, for Dr. Sasaki's patients who have been diagnosed with head and neck cancers. "For me, it's about being there for people who are having a hard time," said Debbi, who regularly attends the monthly meetings. She recently attended a free head and neck tumor screening run by the Otolaryngology team, where she met a woman who was diagnosed on the spot with a tumor. They later spoke on



the phone, and Debbi anxiously awaited the news when the woman had surgery to remove the mass, which turned out to be benign. "I was there for her," said Debbi, who feels she should give something back in acknowledgement of her own ultimately good fortune.

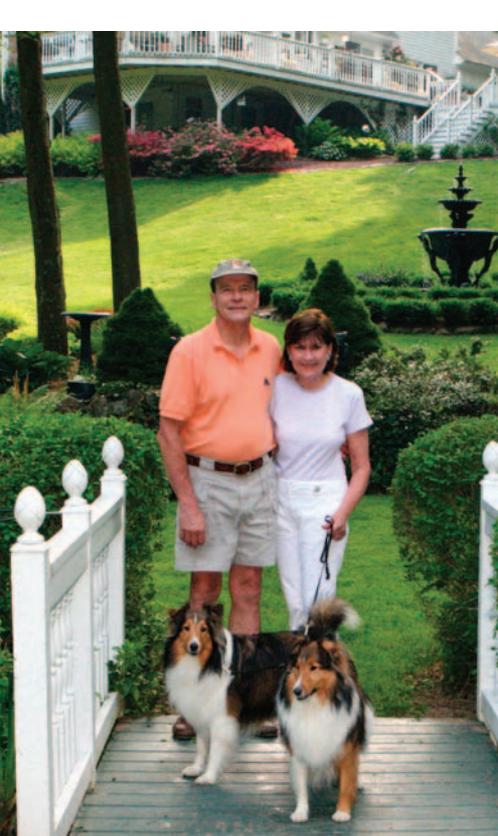
Debbi has passed the two-year mark cancer free, a remarkable milestone for someone who was diagnosed with stage IV head and neck cancer. She continues to go on motorcycle rides with Kent, but she will always remember the one that she took that fall day three years ago and the resulting earache. She said, "That earache kind of saved my life." ☺

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## Growing Support from Angelwood Gardens in Guilford Helps Women's Cancer Research

Mary Anne and Dale Athanas have used their love of gardening to give back to the community and support women's cancer research at Yale Cancer Center. Angelwood Gardens includes over 50 gardens at their private home in Guilford, CT.

The gardens are designed, planted, and maintained by the Athanas' in dedication to cancer survivors.



JUDITH BARBOSA

Mary Anne and Dale Athanas at Anglewood Gardens in Guilford, CT.

The gardens are designed, planted, and maintained by the Athanas' in dedication to cancer survivors. Each year, the gardens are open to the public for one weekend in June to raise money for cancer research, this year's event has raised over \$11,000 for the Discovery to Cure Program to support the research into early detection of women's reproductive cancers. ↻

angelwoodgardens.com

## event calendar August-November 2006

### Ongoing Coast to Coast: A Run for Survivorship

Christian McEvoy is running across the country to support cancer survivors at Yale, check on his progress at [coasttoastrun.org](http://coasttoastrun.org)

### August 27, 2006

#### The Connecticut Challenge

A charity bike ride to support cancer survivors at Yale  
(203) 353-7690  
[ctchallenge.org](http://ctchallenge.org)

### September 4, 2006

#### The New Haven Road Race

Yale Cancer Center has been designated as a beneficiary for this year's event  
[newhavenroadrace.org](http://newhavenroadrace.org)

### September 13, 2006

#### Understanding Cancer Lecture Series

*Prevention, Treatment, and Cure of Women's Cancers*  
Dr. Tom Rutherford  
Yale-New Haven Hospital Cafeteria; 6:00 PM  
(888) 700-6543

### October 11, 2006

#### Understanding Cancer Lecture Series

*Treatment Advances in Breast Cancer*  
Dr. Lyndsay Harris  
Yale-New Haven Hospital Cafeteria; 6:00 PM  
(888) 700-6543

### October 12, 2006

**The Wonder of it All!** A reception celebrating the 10th anniversary of cancer survivor, Dr. Mel Goldstein  
(203) 737-2439

### November 1, 2006

#### Frankly Speaking Lecture Series

*New Discoveries in Cancer*  
Dr. Edward Chu  
Yale-New Haven Hospital Cafeteria; 6:00 PM  
(888) 700-6543 Sponsored by the Wellness Community

## clinical trials at Yale Cancer Center

Yale Cancer Center currently has numerous clinical trials available to cancer patients in search of novel therapies. These trials are evaluating new methods of prevention, detection, and treatment of cancer. Clinical trials give patients at Yale Cancer Center immediate access to the future of cancer care.

Clinical trials are currently available for patients in fifteen different disease areas. For more information on all of the trials currently open for accrual at Yale Cancer Center, please visit [yalecancercenter.org](http://yalecancercenter.org) or call 1-866-YALECANCER.

### Clinical trials open for patients diagnosed with Melanoma:

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <b>HIC 27147</b><br>Harriet Kluger, MD      | A Randomized, Double-Blind, Multicenter Study Comparing MDX010 Monotherapy, MDX010 in Combination with a Melanoma Peptide Vaccine, and Melanoma Vaccine Monotherapy in HLA-A*0201 Positive Patients with Previously Treated Unresectable Stage III or IV Melanoma |
| <b>HIC 27409</b><br>Mario Sznol, MD         | A Phase I Study of 5-Azacytidine in Combination with Interferon-Alpha in Unresectable or Metastatic Melanoma and Renal Cell Carcinoma   |
| <b>HIC 0508000542</b><br>Mario Sznol, MD    | A Phase I Ascending Multi-Dose Study of BMS-663513, an Agonistic Anti-CD137 Monoclonal Antibody, Administered Every Three Weeks, in Patients with Malignant Melanoma  |
| <b>HIC 0509000563</b><br>Harriet Kluger, MD | A Double-Blind, Randomized, Placebo-controlled Phase III Trial of Carboplatin, Paclitaxel and BAY 43-9006 versus Carboplatin, Paclitaxel and Placebo in Patients with Unresectable Locally Advanced or Stage IV Melanoma  |
| <b>HIC 0508000541</b><br>Mario Sznol, MD    | A Phase II Study of Everolimus in Combination with Imatinib in Metastatic Melanoma  |
| <b>HIC 0603001235</b><br>Mario Sznol, MD    | A Phase I Study of CR011-vcMMAE in Patients with Unresectable Stage III or Stage IV Melanoma  |

## La Cassa Magica Raises Funds to Support Clinical Trials

Yale Cancer Center's seventh annual gala, La Cassa Magica, was held on Saturday, April 29th at the Belle Haven Club in Greenwich, CT. The gala raised over \$550,000 to support the development of translational research and the initiation of clinical trials at Yale Cancer Center.

Dr. Jennifer A.K. Patterson and Sir Howard Stringer were the Vice Chairs for the evening, which was hosted by CNN television news anchor and 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 Kelly, Nicholas Makes, Joseph Perella, and Dr. Richard Sackler.



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**Jeff Keith**, founder of Swim Across America, Bike Across America, and The Connecticut Challenge, a fundraising event to support the Connecticut Challenge Survivorship Clinic at Yale Cancer Center, was honored for his lifelong commitment to raising funds for cancer research and support services. Keith, a cancer survivor, is a resident of Fairfield, CT.

Yale Cancer Center would like to thank the generous underwriters for the evening: **Duke Brodsky**,

**CuraGen Corporation, Mr. and Mrs. Robert Evans - R.S. Evans Foundation, Inc., Dr. Jennifer A.K. Patterson and Sir Howard Stringer, Amy and Joseph Perella, Pratt & Whitney, Purdue Pharma L.P., Sony Corporation of America, Turner Construction Company, and Paula Zahn and Richard Cohen.**

The Venetian themed evening included performances by Tony Award winner, **James Naughton**. Opening for Mr. Naughton, **Elizabeth Hainen**, principal harpist for the Philadelphia Orchestra, and her husband, percussionist **Dave DePeters**, performed together. In addition, **K.T. Sullivan**, a regular headliner at the Oak Room of the Algonquin Hotel, sang cabaret selections. 🍷



1 Paula Zahn, Sir Howard Stringer, and James Naughton

2 Dr. and Mrs. Richard Edelson

3 Mr. and Mrs. Jeff Keith

4 Dr. Gerrit Argento and Kathryn Anderson Adams

5 Mr. and Mrs. Daniel FitzPatrick

## staff briefs

**Dr. Elizabeth Claus**, Associate Professor of Epidemiology and Public Health, has been awarded a two-year \$250,000 grant from the Susan B. Komen Foundation to study outcomes for women diagnosed with breast cancer.

**Candance Cotto, RN** has joined the practice of **Dr. Francine Foss** supporting clinical research for patients with lymphoma.

The Clinical Trials Office welcomes **Joan Bosson-Heenan**, Research Associate, **Jennifer Seeley**, Research Assistant, and **Jayne Clarke**, Research Assistant, to their staff.

**Linda Mowad, RN**, Director of the Cancer Information Service at Yale Cancer Center, has been re-elected as the Chair of the Board of the American Cancer Society New England Division.

**Thomas Rutherford, MD, PhD**, Associate Professor of Obstetrics, Gynecology and Reproductive Sciences, has been appointed Section Chief of Gynecologic Oncology.

**Brian Smith, MD**, Professor of Laboratory Medicine, has been named Chairman of the Department of Laboratory Medicine at Yale School of Medicine and Chief of Laboratory Medicine at Yale-New Haven Hospital.

**Lynn Wilson, MD, MPH**, Clinical Director and Vice Chairman of the Department of Therapeutic Radiology, has been appointed to a five-year term as Vice Chairman of the Scientific Committee for the American Society for Therapeutic Radiology and Oncology (ASTRO).

**Carol Winch-McVety** has been hired in the office of **Dr. Lyndsay Harris** as an administrative assistant.



**American Red Cross**  
Connecticut Blood Services Region

Providing for patients at Yale Cancer Center.  
Please consider yourself asked and donate blood.  
1-800-GIVE LIFE

» Lifestyle Factors continued from page 1

by using a light that sends a signal, which can be interpreted to reveal the actual nutritional status of the body.

In the National Quality of Life Study, scientists at Yale are collaborating with the American Cancer Society to examine all aspects of quality of life in cancer survivors, and in particular their use of supplements and herbal medicines. In Connecticut, more than 1,000 survivors of the ten most common cancers have completed a detailed questionnaire revealing what supplements they're taking, why they're taking them, where they got their information, and whether or not they have informed their medical care provider. "We're looking to see which people are more likely to take herbal or vitamin supplements and why," said Brenda Cartmel, PhD, a researcher in the Yale School of Public Health.

In addition to food and supplement intake, Yale researchers are also looking at whether lifestyle factors and certain genetic mutations may increase cancer risk. Many studies have already shown that obesity is a major risk factor for endometrial cancer, but Herbert Yu, MD, PhD, Associate Professor of Epidemiology and Public Health, is investigating dietary intake and physical activity and analyzing blood samples to determine if an inherited variation in genes involved in energy metabolism might influence endometrial cancer risk. In two related studies, Yu and Harvey Risch, MD, PhD, Professor of Epidemiology and Public Health, are studying pancreatic cancer in American and Chinese patients. "The puzzle is that all of the risk factors for pancreatic cancer

"The role of these lifestyle variables can be important both in terms of determining whether somebody gets a cancer in the first place but also if they've had cancer, whether they are going to survive it or develop a second cancer."

Susan Mayne

are higher in Chinese than in Americans, but the incidence is the opposite; Americans have a 20 percent higher incidence of pancreatic cancer than Chinese people," said Yu. Researchers will try to discover what protective factors may be influencing lower pancreatic cancer rates in China, including whether genetic make-up or drinking green tea may play a role.

Physical activity is another area where research has



TERRY DAGRA DI

Susan Mayne, PhD, Associate Director of Population Sciences at Yale Cancer Center and a Professor of Epidemiology and Public Health

shown there are health benefits. Observational studies show that higher levels of physical activity are associated with a lower risk of breast cancer, for example, but as is the case with many dietary studies, many rely on self-reporting. Melinda Irwin, PhD, MPH, Assistant Professor of Epidemiology and Public Health, is currently conducting two clinical trials in which breast cancer patients who are undergoing treatment or have already finished their treatment and who are not exercising regularly are enrolled in a supervised exercise program at Yale. Irwin will look at surrogate markers of prognosis, such as certain hormones, that may change with exercise. Similar to drugs such as tamoxifen, exercise blocks estrogen activity, but without any harmful side effects or increased risk of other cancers. "If we can show that exercise can favorably change those surrogate markers then it's hypothesized that physical activity would be beneficial for prognosis," she said. For women who already get regular exercise and are diagnosed with breast cancer, Irwin believes that physical activity has already benefited them. "There is some evidence from animal studies that those who were exercising had a delay in onset and were diagnosed with a lower stage of cancer," she said.

"The role of these lifestyle variables can be important both in terms of determining whether somebody gets a cancer in the first place but also if they've had cancer, whether they are going to survive it or develop a second cancer," said Mayne. This fall, Yale Cancer Center will open the Connecticut Challenge Survivorship Clinic that will focus on the long-term effects of cancer and its treatment. In addition to medical care, the Clinic will offer physical activity and diet consultation to cancer survivors. ☺