

GiveHealth**NB**



MEET DA VINCI

The next generation of surgery

THREE DECADES OF
GIVING BACK

The Vito's story

Into the **LIONS' DEN**

Forging the future of medicine for New Brunswick



GiveHealthNB

A publication of the Saint John Regional Hospital Foundation

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New hope after cancer diagnosis,
Bob McVicar's journey.
See the story on page 21.

Larry Cain underwent robotic-assisted surgery to treat cancer.

See page 17 to find out about the campaign to bring robotic-assisted surgery to Saint John.

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Message from the President and CEO

Hello friends,

I hope you've enjoyed reading stories found within the pages of the first two issues of GiveHealthNB as much as the Foundation is honoured to share the fantastic work being done at Horizon's Saint John Regional Hospital. Our third edition focuses on the incredible contributions our donors and community continue to make, providing the opportunity for innovation in health care right here at home.

Since our last issue, the Foundation has been buzzing with excitement. Our third edition of the medical competition, Lions' Den, was an incredible success. Three exceptional teams presented progressive health care ideas that foster innovation and technological advances, proving once again that our physicians and health care professionals continue to strive for better and more sustainable care for all New Brunswickers.

In addition to our cover story, we celebrate a partnership that has spanned 30 years with Vito's and the Georgoudis family, and we meet - a medical robot that is transforming operating rooms across North America.

As we celebrate these inspiring stories, we also know it is a time of celebration for you and yours as we enter the holiday season. On behalf of the Foundation, I would like to extend well wishes for the holiday season and a safe and happy new year.

Thank you again for your trust and generosity.

With gratitude,

Jamie Gallagher



Jamie Gallagher

Foundation features

Protecting mother and baby through simulation

In health care education, a revolution is taking place in the form of high-fidelity simulations that allow students to learn and teams to practise by doing.

Our donors have played a fundamental role by establishing a permanent financial bedrock through endowed gifts. Their generosity empowers us to fund initiatives, like the childbirth simulator, a joint project of the departments of Obstetrics/Gynecology and Emergency Medicine.

Babies don't always wait for the drive to Saint John. The Sussex, Charlotte County and Grand Manan Emergency Departments attend these births without access to on-site obstetric support.

Serious events associated with childbirth do not happen very often, even in large birthing centres. Our medical teams get little opportunity to become efficient in responding to these emergencies.

The childbirth simulator will bridge this gap.

The computerized simulation manikin is extremely realistic - anatomically accurate and able to "die" during a simulated scenario.

"Simulation allows teams to practise events in a safe setting," says Dr. Robin Clouston, a physician in Emergency Medicine and one of three leads working on this initiative. "So, there is great opportunity for the training of our health care students and new providers."

Dr. Clouston says the simulator will allow teams to fine tune team management of more common obstetric complications along with more infrequent events.

She adds: "It will particularly benefit our rural emergency departments, where access to a labour and delivery unit is not close at hand."

"In these scenarios, both clinical decision-making and team communication is essential."

– Dr. Robin Clouston



Community inspired for better care

When John T. McMillan Jr. was diagnosed with acute leukemia, his life and those of his family and friends were changed forever.

After losing him, his family and friends recognized that had he survived, he would have given back a thousandfold so that others may not have to suffer as he did.

Although a tragedy, John's passing spurred the creation of the John T. McMillan Jr. Memorial Foundation. For 15 years, the Foundation has been raising funds locally to provide better care and treatment for cancer patients.

Recently the John T. McMillan Jr. Memorial Foundation received a gift of \$15,000 from the Woodstock Rib Fest Committee. The foundation matched this incredible donation and purchased a DNA-RNA extractor for the Saint John Regional Hospital's laboratory medicine program.



Celebrating a donation from the John T. McMillan Jr. Memorial Foundation. From left, Jeff MacDonald, Dr. Terrance Comeau, Cheri Lumsden and Derek Dobson.

A vital tool in advancing our DNA sequencing program, the DNA-RNA extractor will allow our geneticists to develop more targeted treatments for our cancer patients.

Even more impressive is that our laboratory medicine program exists as it does today, largely due to the Foundation.

It has invested more than \$850,000 to establish and expand lab programs for the treatment and diagnosis of cancer, along with funds to relieve the financial burden on patients and their families.

Thanks to Mr. McMillan's generous spirit, and the community it has inspired, we are building better care, better treatments, and changing lives for the better.

Making an impact through enhanced lung cancer care

Brian Johnston became a physician because he wanted to positively impact people's lives through science and technology.

His passion for improving care drove him to compete in the 2021 Lions' Den medical competition and pitch the need for enhanced lung cancer care.

The pitch involved a 3D bronchoscopic navigation system to find smaller, more distal tumours in conjunction with fluorescence imaging technology to show exactly where the cancer is and spare healthy lung tissue when operating. Building on existing programs, the plan would reduce the time from the identification of a potential lung cancer to definitive treatment and save lives.

The Enhanced Lung Cancer Care pitch garnered considerable

donations from the community to the tune of \$120,000, including a generous gift from Dr. Johnston.

"My wife Lisa and I are in the fortunate position to be able to contribute," says Dr. Johnston.

"Because lung cancer care and research are so chronically underfunded, we felt that we needed to lead by example – 'It's a lesson learned from my parents, who quietly gave back to their community whenever they could.'"

– Dr. Brian Johnston

Foundation features

'It's not just our privilege but our responsibility'

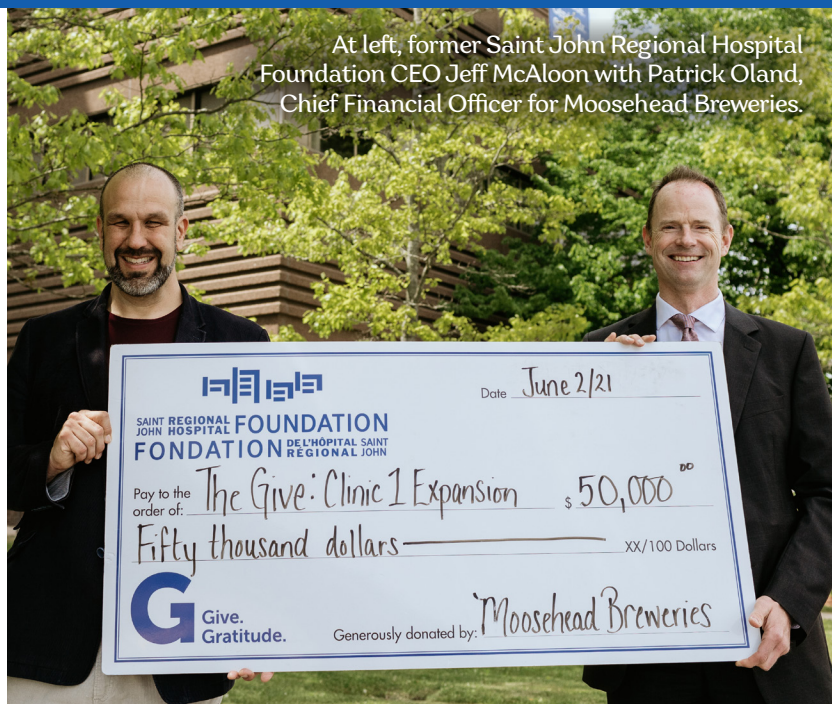
As local businesses go there are not many that are more a part of Saint John's identity than Moosehead Breweries. With long family ties to the area, it's not hard to understand their passion for the community.

"It's not just our privilege but our responsibility to take care of each other and to offer a helping hand," says Patrick Oland, Chief Financial Officer for Moosehead.

The company's history of supporting the Saint John Regional Hospital is long – stretching over 30 years. In that time, it has invested an outstanding \$418,000 in various initiatives.

From Cardiac Services to Mental Health, Diagnostic Imaging and the Emergency Department, Moosehead's spirit of corporate giving has touched almost every area of health care.

And they continue to be a leader in supporting the needs of their community. Their most recent gift is a generous \$50,000 for the Clinic 1 Expansion.



At left, former Saint John Regional Hospital Foundation CEO Jeff McAloon with Patrick Oland, Chief Financial Officer for Moosehead Breweries.

“If the last year has taught us anything, it's that the service our hospitals provide is invaluable, and we continue to feel a deep gratitude.”

– Patrick Oland

Tech savvy donors inspired by innovation in health care

For Linda Thornback, the decision to become a monthly donor was simple because the Foundation's mandate aligned with her passion for technology.

Linda and her husband own a technology company. When they moved to Saint John, she decided to research where they could make an impact.

“I was impressed with how the health care system in New Brunswick is moving to modernize,” she says. “I was thinking what we could do, and the answer was to donate.”

That's when they decided to become monthly donors to the Foundation to help support innovation and technology within health care.

“Becoming a monthly donor to me means that the organization will be able to count on those funds and plan for the future. When it comes to project planning, I know the benefits of having guaranteed money coming in.”

“For me personally, once I've been impressed with

something, like what the Foundation is doing, I'm ready to make a commitment and to let them know I want this to be an ongoing long-term relationship.”

She encourages anyone thinking about becoming a monthly donor to do so, no matter the amount, as every little bit helps.

“In my eyes, becoming a monthly donor to the Foundation means you are making a commitment to an organization and to a group of people who are boldly trying to solve problems.”



Monthly donor Linda Thornback with her son, Liam Thornback.

Foundation features

Comfort and care for our veterans

“Dad always said he was one of the lucky ones,” recalls Judy Farquharson. “He didn't have to serve overseas – World War 2 ended while he was waiting to be deployed.”

Judy's father, Donald McBrien, turned 95 this year.

In his declining health, Judy and her sister, Julie, say they are thankful to have him at the Ridgewood Veterans Wing owing to his service in the Canadian Army.

“He was able to do some of his training in accounting when he was in the military,” says Ms. Farquharson, “and it served him well.”

For most of his career, Mr. McBrien worked for the Department of Veterans Affairs Canada. There, he was lucky enough to meet the love of his life, Elsie Newcombe, an RNA at the Ridgewood Veterans Wing.

“They married in 1970 and later had my sister and I,” says Ms. Farquharson. “So I guess we owe part of our existence to the Department of Veterans Affairs and the Ridgewood Veterans Wing.”

It was this personal connection that inspired the sisters to support Field of Flags, an annual fundraiser for the Veterans Wing.

The event raises money for the Ridgewood Veterans Comfort Fund, which enhances and supports the day-to-day lives of those who have served by covering purchases that brighten a veteran's day. This includes recreation activities, medical equipment and comfort items specific to a veteran's needs.

“Dad was blessed with good health and financial security following his service and career. We are happy for him to be able to stay at Ridgewood and wanted to be able to provide some financial support,” Ms. Farquharson says.

The residents of the Ridgewood Veterans Wing, along with others in care homes, have suffered since COVID, with very little contact with the outside world and only occasional visitors.

“This is to give them something special,” Ms. Farquharson says, “to make their home at Ridgewood more comfortable.”



Donald McBrien with his daughters Judy Farquharson, at left, and Julie McBrien.

Welcome aboard!

It is a pleasure to welcome four new and highly accomplished leaders to our team. Their collective experience across a range of diverse strategic roles will be highly instrumental as we continue to advance the Foundation's strategic plan. We are excited to channel their talent, expertise and energy into furthering our mission.

Introducing our new board members:



Armand Iratunga,
Senior Tax and Business Advisor
with Owens MacFadyen Group



Nancy Creamer Ervin,
Vice-President and Portfolio
Manager at TD Wealth Private
Investment Advice



Colleen Baxter,
Human Resources Executive with
J.D. Irving, Ltd. (Retired)



Melanie Dowd Martell,
Manager of Real Estate, Investment
and Client Relations for the Dowd
Group of Companies and Somerset
Investments



Into the LIONS' DEN

Forging the future of medicine for New Brunswick

Seven years ago, Zach Kilburn was at a conference in Chicago when he first heard of how other hospitals were using 3D printing.

He was immediately intrigued by its potential for his field of medical imaging.

Medical images like CAT or PET scans and MRIs are presented on a screen in two dimensions. Surgeons, who work on their patients in a three-dimensional world, must make leaps of inference between the images and the clinical reality.

Introducing a 3D printer would bridge that gap, allowing surgeons to print a replica of their patient's unique anatomy in three dimensions, from blood vessels and bones to other body tissues. Surgeons could plan and practise before the procedure, studying the precise clinical indications and structures on which they'd operate.

"There were a few 3D printing programs going on at the time, and they really showed how it matched with diagnostic imaging – how those images could be pulled out of CAT scans and MRIs and brought to life with 3D-printed objects," Mr. Kilburn, Regional Director of Diagnostic Imaging at Horizon Health Network, recalls now.

He wanted to bring the idea back home to New Brunswick

and avidly started talking to vendors and developing a proposal.

Then, three years ago, plastic surgeon Ian Maxwell and radiologist Darren Ferguson came into his office.

Dr. Maxwell, who had arrived at the Saint John Regional Hospital after having used 3D printers in other provinces, wanted to make a model of a patient's skull to prepare for an upcoming surgery.

"That's great," Mr. Kilburn told the doctors. "But we do not have that technology as it sits right now."

However, he told them of the proposal he was working on and asked if they'd like to join in. They jumped aboard.

The idea would be groundbreaking for New Brunswick. The Regional would become the first hospital in the province to acquire a 3D printer.

It would lay the groundwork for even more advanced, tech-enabled medical imaging and 3D printing opportunities to further drive better patient outcomes, open the door to new levels of collaboration between the clinicians and technicians within and beyond the province, and provide the chance to develop intellectual property and help recruit top talent to the hospital.

They just needed to find the right opportunity to pitch their idea and get the funding to make their concept a reality.



Filming the Lions' Den winners reveal.

Then Lions' Den came along. The medical competition with a \$500,000 prize and a focus on innovation in health care seemed perfect.

When corporate director and philanthropist Miranda Hubbs puts her money and time into something, she wants to see the impact.

"You can write a cheque," she says, "but that's no fun. You want to know where it's going."

So when she was asked to join the judges' panel of Lions' Den, the Saint John Regional Hospital Foundation's flagship competition for innovation in health care, it was an easy yes.

In 2018, the Foundation was the first in Canada to host a Dragons' Den-style pitch competition, inspiring similar events hosted by other hospital foundations in Toronto and elsewhere. The 2021 iteration's reality show format further advanced its innovative approach to health care fundraising.

A corporate director and philanthropist, Ms. Hubbs was one of a panel of five judges – the Lions – who each gave \$100,000 and their astute acumen to the cause.

While Ms. Hubbs lives in Toronto and doesn't have any direct links to New Brunswick, Lions' Den "wasn't a tough sell," she says.

Ms. Hubbs was introduced to the Lions' Den concept

through Derek Pannell, a Saint John businessman with whom she has served on a couple of corporate boards. A couple of years ago, when the Saint John Regional Hospital Foundation was looking for judges for its next instalment, it was an easy yes.

"It is such a great cause, and the people involved are so passionate," says Ms. Hubbs, Vice-Chair of the Canadian Red Cross and co-founder of Tiffany Circle, a group of women philanthropists in the Red Cross. "And when I heard what a difference this program had made, what they were able to fund and get into the hospital from a technology and programming point of view, I was in."

In the spring, she and her fellow judges met over Zoom to choose the winning pitch after reviewing briefs on the three competing projects. Ms. Hubbs and Scott McCain, Chair of the Board of McCain Foods Ltd., were in Toronto; Mike Webb, Executive Vice-President of

“What attracted me to this was Saint John, first and foremost. And the Saint John Regional is the largest, most highly respected hospital in the region.”

– Scott McCain

Nutrien, dialled in from Calgary; Dr. David Elias, CEO of Canadian Health Solutions, and Bob Owens, Co-founder of Owens MacFadyen Group, were in Saint John.


For Dr. Elias and Mr. McCain, this was a return performance. Both were judges in the Foundation's original production in 2018.

Mr. McCain, who is CEO of the Saint John Sea Dogs and has strong family and business roots in New Brunswick, says that besides being a "cool concept" for a fundraiser, the local connection clinched his involvement.

"There's no shortage of organizations looking for support," he says. "What attracted me to this was Saint John, first and foremost. And the Saint John Regional is the largest, most highly respected hospital in the region."

And as a sports fan, he loves a little friendly rivalry.

"When you have a competition, it's more fun," he says. "And competition drives better performance. When you're up against your colleagues to compete for limited funding, you're going to put your best foot forward."

 "In philanthropy, we talk a lot about transformational giving. I think this project is the definition of transformational giving."

– Miranda Hubbs

While Ms. Hubbs says each Lion came into the deliberations with different ideas of what they wanted to fund, they found their way to unanimity. She and Mr. McCain both credit Dr. Elias, a physician, for helping them understand the medical implications of the proposals before them.

First, they heard from Team Improving Speed & Accuracy of Drug Detection. This team sought to buy a Tandem Mass Spectrometer to increase the number of drugs the Regional's lab can identify in a single sample, cutting the time from test to results to improve patient safety and prevent overdoses.

Next up was Team Imaging Enhancement Centre – Mr. Kilburn, Dr. Ferguson and Dr. Maxwell – with their pitch for a 3D printer that would give clinicians a virtual copy of their patient's anatomy to plan and practise surgery, improving patient outcomes and increasing efficiency.

Finally, they heard the Team Enhanced Lung Cancer Care proposal for leading-edge diagnostic equipment for earlier

detection. That team also proposed creating a navigator position to better support lung cancer patients through a scary and overwhelming process.

"The pitches were educational, they were inspiring, and what they're proposing all change and save lives," Ms. Hubbs recalls. "Everything that they showed us was a better path to a better future for people. Each one of those projects fulfilled that promise."

While the Lions deliberated in three locations, the cameras of film crews in three provinces rolled.

Like so many projects initially slated for 2020, Lions' Den had to adapt.

The competition was originally going to follow the same format as its first iteration in 2018: a live event in front of a packed house at the Imperial in Saint John.

But when COVID-19 made that kind of gathering risky, if not outrightly prohibited, the Foundation shifted from stage to screen.

"The production challenges of having three film crews working simultaneously across the country were significant," says Shannon Hunter, the Foundation's Director of Marketing and Communications. "Thanks to our crews, our Lions and our medical teams, who showed such creativity and flexibility, we made it work."

Working with Hemmings House, a Saint John film production company, the Foundation switched gears to create a reality TV-inspired documentary.

"The show must go on," Scott McCain says. "And they made it very painless and easy."

The production kicked off early in 2021 when each of the three medical teams was paired with a local marketing professional to help them craft an original video pitch. Through the winter, they worked on their three-minute videos, which became the centrepiece of the final, 30-minute documentary capturing the entire journey, from concept to winning pitch. (If you missed it, the full film can be found on the Foundation's website.)

The production challenges were significant. The hospital was off-limits, so shooting footage of the teams in their professional settings was out. Along with masked crews and socially distanced film sets, some shoots had to be rescheduled around pandemic lockdowns and restrictions. Filming the Lions' deliberation day had to wait until Alberta, Ontario and New Brunswick's rules allowed it.

"I was so impressed at the way the Foundation was able to pivot and make the most of it," Miranda Hubbs says.

“And, as it turns out, I think they’ll be able to leverage this a lot further than a one-night event.”

While the original event in 2018 was seen by some 500 people in the theatre audience, the viewing potential of the new one was unlimited, unbound by time and space constraints. By September, more than 128,000 people had viewed the trailer online and in cinemas across New Brunswick.

Since the launch date, the website has had more than 16,000 views, and the film has been watched online more than 2,500 times. And when it aired across Atlantic Canada on CTV on Sept. 18, the potential audience was more than 356,000.

The Lions weren’t the only ones who got a vote.

On Sept. 10, when the show aired online and the winner was revealed, the public was invited to select the winner of the Community Choice Award. This \$75,000 prize, provided by J.D. Irving, Ltd., was “unlocked” by Team Enhanced Lung Cancer Care when it hit matching community donations.

Ultimately, Team Imaging Enhancement Centre emerged victorious, nabbing the \$500,000 grand prize as well as a \$100,000 research grant from the New Brunswick Innovation Foundation.

The biggest factor in the Lions’ decision?

“Whatever we funded had to go beyond the hospital’s immediate needs and was able to be set up and leveraged for the future as well,” Ms. Hubbs says. “The Imaging Enhancement Centre takes the Saint John Regional Hospital to the leading edge of technology, and then they can leverage that to make it go even further.”

The judges also considered how the winning proposal would better position the hospital to recruit and retain top talent to help improve the standard of care.

“What you want is that one thing no one else has. So for anyone who wants to train and learn and go into that area of expertise, this is the place to be. The Imaging Enhancement Centre can become that place to be,” Ms. Hubbs says.



Team Imaging Enhancement Centre winning the grand prize.

"In philanthropy, we talk a lot about transformational giving. I think this project is the definition of transformational giving."

The New Brunswick Innovation Foundation can help make connections to potential partners and other funders to push the technology to its full potential.

"What can you do with that tool that's going to be new and innovative and open up new avenues of health care in New Brunswick?" says Laura Richard, the Innovation Foundation's Director of Research. "Beyond the immediate applications, there's a lot of other directions you can go with that equipment and expertise. What else could we explore that's cutting edge?"

Dr. Richard sees the potential for the Imaging Enhancement Centre to generate new intellectual property that is both exportable and a magnet for recruitment.

"What they are doing has a really broad scope of possible applications because it's bringing engineering methodologies into the medical space," she says. "When you make those kinds of cross-disciplinary jumps, there's a lot of directions you can go."

By the spring of 2022, the new Imaging Enhancement Centre at the Saint John Regional Hospital hopes to 3D print its first model.

There's much work to be done in the meantime. Since their Lions' Den win, Mr. Kilburn and his team have kicked into action. They need to staff the centre, drawing on technologists from their current team, whose 3D post-processing skills will translate nicely to 3D printing.

And then there's the space itself. They are working with the facilities team on renovations, including installing big windows to showcase the printers and other technology to patients and the public. Mr. Kilburn says anyone on their way to a CAT scan or MRI – some 40,000 people a year – will pass by.

"It really is a provincial project. Yes, it's based in Saint John, but it is truly a New Brunswick solution."

– Zach Kilburn

"It's a great way for them to see what New Brunswick is doing when it comes to medical innovation, how we're pushing things forward," he says.

He is also in conversation with a number of stakeholders, including other hospitals in New Brunswick, that will be able to access the technology. A physician from Bathurst, say, or Moncton, will be able to send images to the centre, where they will be 3D printed and shipped back.

And while his team's Lions' Den pitch focused on the pre-surgical benefits of 3D printing, there are many other possibilities. The models can be used in patient education and involvement, helping physicians better explain a condition or procedure than two-dimensional medical scans allow.

"It's really hard for people that aren't used to looking at images in slices or at cross-sectional anatomy to visualize what's happening in their body," Mr. Kilburn says. "The printed models can go a long way in promoting better outcomes because the patient understands what they're working with."

Along with anatomical models, 3D printers can create tools, prostheses and even repair parts for medical devices that aren't possible or are extremely challenging using traditional methods.

"There are hundreds if not thousands of different applications, both within health care and outside of it," Mr. Kilburn says. "We're only scratching the surface."

Even beyond the hospital and the Horizon Health Network, opportunities for collaboration abound.

"There are some really exciting partnerships we could explore," Mr. Kilburn says. Following the win, he's been contacted by educational institutions such as the New Brunswick Community College and the University of New Brunswick in Saint John, economic development agencies such as Opportunities New Brunswick and even the private sector.

"It's really exciting to explore those things that are outside of health care," he says. "Our main goal is patient-care delivery and improving those patient outcomes. But all of those things come hand-in-hand with developing the program and growing it further."

Beyond 3D printers, the Imaging Enhancement Centre encompasses other technologies, including artificial intelligence.

Mr. Kilburn's department is the first in Canada to invest in SubtlePET, AI-powered software that uses a sophisticated algorithm to increase the efficiency of its scanners. Along with reducing the costs of the wildly expensive isotopes those scans use and the amount of radiation a patient receives, it can lower wait times and increase patient throughput by about 30 per cent.

"We're going to find things like this that are game-changing," he says.

There are also clinical engineering applications to explore, such as 3D printing prosthetics and tools, models for medical education and repair parts for medical devices.

"There's untapped potential all over the place," Mr. Kilburn says. "If your brain can dream it up, it could be possible, it could be printed."

THE VITO'S STORY

30 Years of Giving Back



The Georgoudis clan at Vito's. From front to back: Mike, George N. ("Little George"), George P. ("Medium George") and George D. ("Big George").

For George ("Big George") Georgoudis, there is no larger way to impact his community than by giving to the Saint John Regional Hospital Foundation.

"We think that supporting the hospital is where we can have the biggest impact on the community across the board," says Mr. Georgoudis, whose family owns Vito's restaurants. "At some point, we're all touched by the health care system. It is something we all need, that affects us or our families - a child, parent, uncle or grandparent."

Vito's and the Georgoudis family have been long-standing supporters of the Saint John Regional Hospital Foundation - the year 2022 will mark 30 years of giving to the Foundation.

From the very first charitable golf tournament in 1992, they have been ardent champions of the cause. From their annual spaghetti nights at their restaurants to supporting

our Radiothon, Cardiac Walk, MindCare and campaigns like Clinic 1, they have raised more than \$80,000 for the Foundation.

They are a beacon in the community, a shining example of what partnerships between organizations and companies can achieve in working together for the community.

The Foundation is fortunate to have a wide array of these partnerships. Across the Saint John region, businesses have joined with us to raise funds to advance health care.

Like Vito's, these organizations work with the Foundation to channel their giving. And it allows their employees to get involved as well, through workplace events that not only benefit the community but boost camaraderie around the office.

For Vito's, giving back is part of the culture - a sense that part of the company's duty is to the community.

In talking about how important it has been for Vito's to support the Foundation and its work, Mr. Georgoudis remembers how important hospital care was to his family decades ago.

He shares the story of how in 1973, the family was involved in a horrific car crash in Moncton that claimed the lives of his mother, brother and sister. Only he and his father survived. While he was able to walk out of the hospital the next day, his father remained in hospital for 16 years, until he passed away.

To this day, the crucial role the hospital played in their

lives is not lost on him. Neither is the reality that hospitals benefit tremendously from the support of donors.

"Hospitals have a lot of needs. The government can only fund so much - taxpayers can only cover so much," he says.

"We feel this is part of our civic duty."

For more information on getting your organization involved in supporting the Saint John Regional Hospital, visit www.thegive.ca or contact the Foundation at (506) 648-6400.



The future of *surgery* is here



In 2017, Larry Cain and his wife, Helena, marked their 27th wedding anniversary in a Toronto hotel room. It was a muted celebration.

Just the day before, the Quispamsis man had undergone prostate cancer surgery in Canada's largest city, though he was discharged after just one night. A few days later he was on a plane, flying home to Saint John.

That kind of speedy discharge and the smooth, quick recovery that followed was what had convinced Mr. Cain to go to Toronto in the first place.


There, he could have the surgery assisted by a robot.

When he was first diagnosed, he hadn't heard of robotic-

assisted surgery. But when he began looking into his options, he liked what he read about the technology and its associated patient outcomes.

"At first, I was concerned about whether there was a real advantage to going and having this done robotically versus conventional surgery," he says. "The research I did suggested that the recovery time would be faster, it's less invasive and more accurate in terms of getting everything on the first go-around. It suggested to me that it was the way to have the procedure done."

While he praises the excellent care he received in Saint John before and after his procedure, robotic surgery simply wasn't an option locally, or even in Atlantic Canada, at that time.



Larry Cain, robotic-assisted surgery patient.

It will be soon. The Saint John Regional Hospital Foundation recently launched an ambitious \$6.2 million campaign to acquire a da Vinci, an industry-leading surgical robot that is transforming operating rooms around the world.

"This is exceptionally progressive for us," says Eileen MacGibbon, Vice-President of Clinical Services for Horizon Health Network. "It sets the stage for the next level of surgical program excellence and creates significant opportunities for new types of collaboration."

"This is exceptionally progressive for us. It sets the stage for the next level of surgical program excellence and creates significant opportunities for new types of collaboration."

— Eileen MacGibbon, Horizon Health Network

The da Vinci will be used for prostatectomies, such as the one Mr. Cain underwent, along with a host of other surgical procedures in urology, cardiac care, bowel surgery and gynecology.

"I felt fortunate that going to Toronto for the procedure was accessible to me," says Mr. Cain, who has been cancer-free for over four years. "But it will be nice to have it in the province. The standard of care here is exceptional but there

is always room to adopt new technologies to advance care. I think robotics is one of those cases."

While robots in the operating room may evoke Jetsons-esque images of autonomous helpers (remember Rosie, the robotic housekeeper?), da Vinci is just the latest in an evolution of surgical tools harnessing advanced digital technologies for better outcomes and more sophisticated health care.

In the same way that new cars equipped with advanced assistive technology still need a skilled driver behind the wheel, surgeons remain central to robotic-assisted surgery. They are in the operating room with the patient and the surgical team conducting the procedure. The robot augments a surgeon's eyes and hands, providing extra-human levels of dexterity, vision and control.

In this cutting-edge surgery, the virtuosity of the physician and the powerful virtuality of the robot combine.

"The movements are so intuitive, it really does mimic everything that you're doing," says Dr. Matt Acker, a urologist at the Saint John Regional Hospital who trained in robotic-assisted surgery during his fellowship in the United States. "If I move my hand, the robot is translating that into the exact same motion but in a much finer, scaled-down way."

While robots may sound futuristic, in fact, they've been in the operating room for decades, as far back as the late 1980s, when the first computer-assisted and image-guided

systems proved the value of the approach. Since then, the technology and its adoption have advanced rapidly. It has become the standard of care for many procedures in the United States, where it was pioneered, and beyond.

The da Vinci model that the Regional will acquire has three components: a surgeon's console where the doctor sits, controlling instruments and a camera on a cart positioned beside the patient. These high-precision instruments mimic wrist movement, but with a 360-degree fully articulating arms that dramatically expand the range of motion and eliminates the natural tremors of the human hand.

The instruments also control cameras that provide high-definition, stereoscopic vision at 10 times the magnification of the human eye, giving surgeons much greater depth perception and visualization. There's also a monitor providing the operating room team with a 3D view of the surgical site.

Robotic-assisted surgery was initially used mainly for urological procedures. In the United States today, more than 90 per cent of prostatectomies are done with an assist from robots.

"It's fast becoming that way in Canada as well," Dr. Acker says, with some provinces, including Alberta and British Columbia, already doing the majority of those surgeries robotically.

And robotic-assisted surgery has expanded beyond urology for use in a wide range of procedures, including cardiac, gynecology, thoracic, general surgery, and more.

"The movements are so intuitive, it really does mimic everything that you're doing. If I move my hand, the robot is translating that into the exact same motion but in a much finer, scaled-down way."

— Dr. Matt Acker

"That's evolved even over the last five years," Dr. Acker says. "There has certainly been an incredible change in the distribution of cases. More surgeons are seeing the evolution of minimally invasive surgery and starting to use robotic technologies where it's appropriate."

The Saint John Regional Hospital is perfectly positioned to integrate robotic-assisted surgery into its surgical programs. For one, there's in-house expertise in the technology, with surgeons such as Dr. Acker already trained in robotic surgery.

For Dr. Ansar Hassan, a cardiac surgeon whose fellowship in the United States included studying under the surgeon who acquired FDA approval for robotics in heart surgery, came to the Regional in 2008. He says robotics "was always there in the background as something that I would

eventually advocate for."

But there was groundwork to be laid first. Before it could get a robot, the Regional needed to implement a minimally invasive surgical program. In 2010, it became the first hospital in New Brunswick to pioneer cardiac laparoscopic surgery, which uses small incisions through which the surgeon inserts a camera and instruments. The surgeon can watch the procedure on a monitor and manipulate the instruments with greater precision than traditional open surgeries. The outcomes for patients are clear: less pain, less risk of complications, and faster recoveries.

Just as minimally invasive laparoscopic surgery was a revolutionary advancement over the open surgeries of the past, the advent of robotics goes even further. It offers greater precision, better patient outcomes and the ability to perform operations that would have been incredibly challenging and risky or even impossible using the techniques of the past.

The Regional now has extensive experience in minimally invasive and laparoscopic surgery, which are now routine for a wide variety of procedures, including in urology, cardiac care, bowel surgery and gynecology. Robotic-assisted surgery was the next step.

"We had to work our way up to robotics," says Dr. Jean-François Légaré, Clinical Head of Cardiac Surgery for the New Brunswick Heart Centre. "We are ready."

What is clear, he says, is that the best surgical programs marry minimally invasive approaches with robotics.

"You're taking advantage of all that the robot has to offer: heightened visualization, increased dexterity, the ability to take on more complex procedures. That's where I always saw this program going next."

Dr. Légaré acknowledges the expense of the da Vinci. But the return on investment is there, he says.

"As a Canadian, you are conscious of the health care system. You're conscious of fiscal restraints," he says. "We try to find the easiest, cheapest and fastest way to do a procedure with the same result if not better."

The largest tertiary-care hospital in New Brunswick and provincial leader in minimally invasive surgery, Saint John is the established provincial centre of excellence for cardiac surgery, one of the leading specialties for robot-assisted surgery.

"Saint John is the only centre for heart surgery and other related procedures within the province's cardiology program, so all of those resources and programming already exist," says Janine Doucet, Administrative Director for the New Brunswick Heart Centre. "The da Vinci was a natural fit."

The mobile da Vinci console and cart will make it easy to transfer between operating rooms and departments, ensuring maximum use and impact across the Regional, where many of the doctors are eager to adopt this new technology into their practices.

“Our medical staff have been hearing about robotic approaches and techniques for some time,” Horizon’s Eileen MacGibbon says. “There are many specialties that could benefit from the da Vinci, and we have a number of surgeons on staff who are very interested in exploring those opportunities.”

And the da Vinci builds on the Regional’s push to offer progressive, contemporary care.

“We’ve never shied away from offering cutting-edge technology,” MacGibbon says. “You can get the best care that you can possibly receive, right here in New Brunswick.”

Surgeons like Dr. Acker aren’t the only ones clamouring for the da Vinci.

“I see a patient every week who says, ‘Can I have this done robotically?’” Dr. Acker says. “Patients are savvy. They’re becoming more educated about their surgeries, their conditions and their options. They are asking for it because they see the evidence that there’s a significant benefit compared to the old way.”

And the evidence, such as the research that convinced Larry Cain his best option was going to Toronto for robotic surgery, is clear and compelling.

Robotic-assisted surgery has better patient outcomes and patient satisfaction. It’s correlated with shorter hospital stays and less risk of complications. Robotic surgery patients as a whole recover faster, with less pain and fewer drugs. There is lower blood loss and fewer transfusions.

“It’s neat and tidy,” Dr. Acker says. “Even compared to laparoscopic surgery, because you have such great visualization and control of your hands, and it’s a much cleaner operation. In many cases, it’s essentially a bloodless operation.”

For cardiac patients, they can return to a normal day-to-day lifestyle a month sooner on average.

In urology cases, it cuts the amount of time before removal of the urinary catheter in half, on average, from two weeks to one. Along with less patient discomfort, there are better quality of life outcomes as well, including decreased risk of erectile dysfunction and a quicker return to urinary continence after surgery.

There are also significant benefits for doctors.

“It is very fatiguing for a surgeon to do a complex

laparoscopic surgery,” Dr. Acker says. “It’s hard on your neck, it’s hard on your shoulders, it’s hard on your knees. Often, you’re in awkward positions for hours.”

Contrast that with sitting in ergonomic comfort in the adjustable da Vinci surgeon console.

“You’re relaxed,” he says. “It’s not wreaking havoc on your head and neck. I think the longevity of a surgeon is going to be prolonged by this technology.”

For new doctors and emerging clinicians, robotics is part of their training and something many look for when deciding where to practise.

“Recruitment can be so competitive that the da Vinci is an advantage, an edge that certainly serves New Brunswick well,” Ms. MacGibbon says. “So many of our trainees in fellowship programs now are working with the option to use a robot. When we’re looking to hire, they likely will be choosing to be afforded that ability because they’re comfortable with the training and they understand the value.”

The da Vinci also allows for training, including practising on simulation modules, as well as offering the chance for on-the-job learning.

“There’s the ability to have learners right next to the surgeon in the operating room,” Ms. MacGibbon says. “That’s a whole other element to it.”

Beyond recruitment, the da Vinci also opens the door to networking and collaborating with top-ranking hospitals in North America and around the world along with the chance to lead and participate in clinical research. The Regional has already been in touch with other Canadian hospitals with robotic surgery programs, laying the groundwork for future projects and conversations.

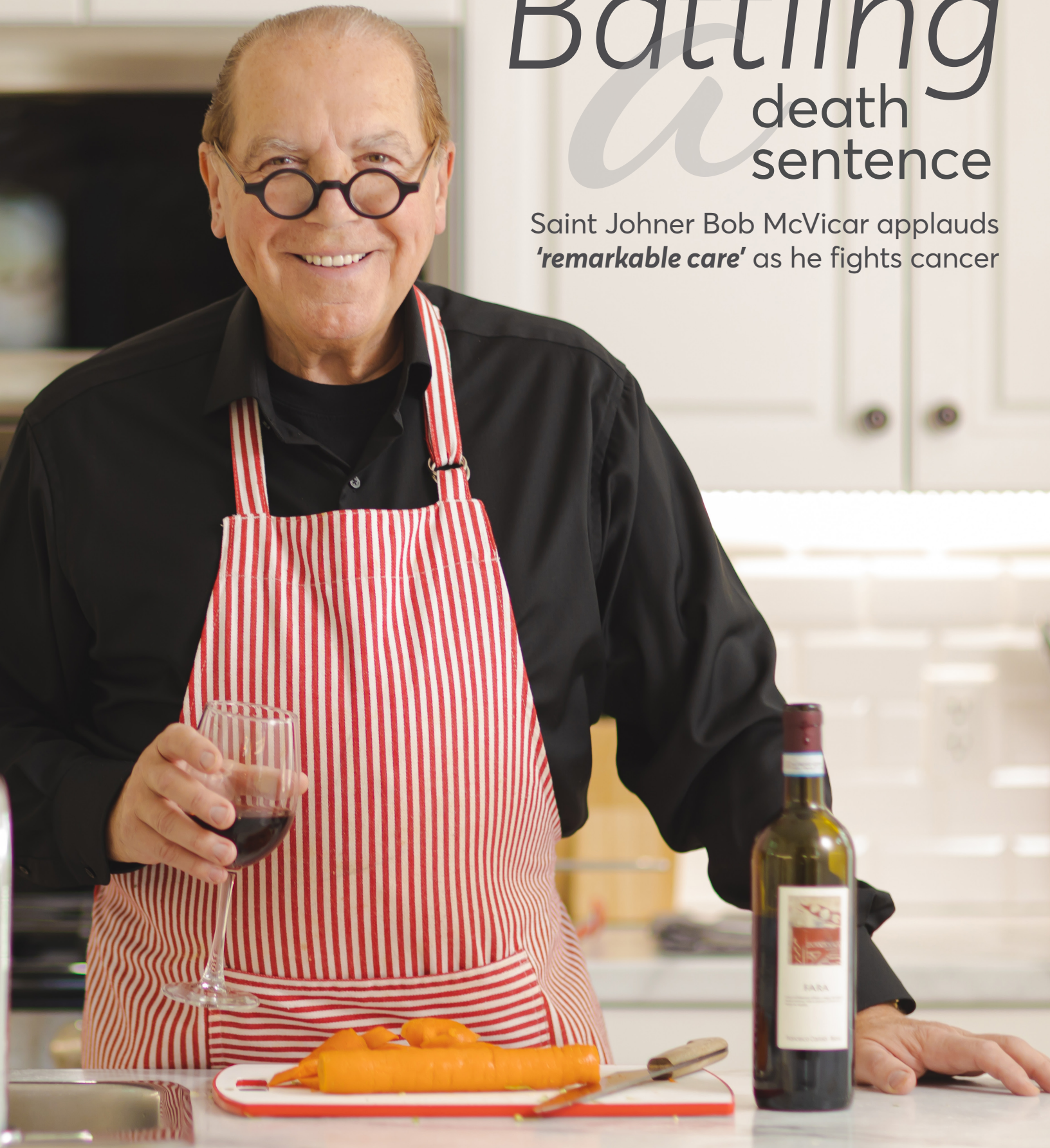
“It creates a community of interest,” Ms. MacGibbon says. “It creates a really great opportunity for collaboration in lots of ways that are beyond what we are doing today.”



Larry Cain says he was fortunate to receive robotic assisted surgery for his cancer.

Battling death sentence

Saint Johner Bob McVicar applauds
'remarkable care' as he fights cancer



Bob McVicar, cancer patient

As her mind reeled with the news that her partner, Bob McVicar, had terminal prostate cancer, Christine Gilliland sank into one of the big armchairs in the radiation oncology waiting room as he underwent his first treatment.

"I was sure we were going in for back surgery and I thought that was going to be difficult enough," she says. "Cancer was not part of the equation at all. I was completely blindsided."

It was August 10, 2019 and the couple had learned the news just hours before. Medical staff rushed to get him into treatment. That evening, he had his first radiation treatment.

Fourteen more would follow over the next 18 days.

"The promptness of it just gave me a great deal of reassurance," Mr. McVicar recalls. "Your head is still spinning. This news was so fresh but within two hours I was getting my first radiation treatment. It wasn't lost on me that this was just remarkable care that I was receiving."

The next morning, he was taken for an MRI, a CAT scan and a battery of tests.

Beyond the speed and quality of the medical attention he received, the couple marvels at the quality and compassion of his care.

"Not only was it efficient, but it was also human," Ms. Gilliland says. "In this community, we have access to incredible care in such a loving, friendly and welcoming environment. And we're home. We don't have to travel for world-class care."

As a former staff member of the Saint John Regional Hospital Foundation, Ms. Gilliland knew that donors were behind some of the comforts that helped soothe their time in the hospital. She thinks back to that first night of the diagnosis when she collapsed into the big comfy armchair in the waiting room of the oncology unit.

"I was pretty much alone in the room and yet I didn't feel alone, somehow," she says. "I didn't feel as frightened as I knew I should. I just kept telling myself, 'There are people in this community who care enough to support others without even really knowing them. People who are giving these incredible gifts to help others going through a crazy time.'"

A few weeks later with the end of his radiation treatments, Mr. McVicar met Dr. Samantha Gray, a medical oncologist. When she asked what he understood of his condition, he said he just had a few months left.

Not necessarily, she said. She explained there were new treatment options, including oral chemotherapy medicine, that could give him another year or more.

"Well, geez, talk about a curveball!" Mr. McVicar says.

"Both of us had gotten our heads around the fact that I was going to die shortly."

There was even a living wake planned, which they decided to still hold. On a Sunday afternoon at Italian by Night, an uptown restaurant, hundreds of friends, neighbours and relatives came to pay their regards. One friend even flew in from China.

While the show of love was heartening, the darkness of the prognosis lurked. He was convinced death was imminent.

He was interested in the new treatment plan, but only if he could expect a decent quality of life. From the outset of his cancer diagnosis, Mr. McVicar had no desire in extending his survival if it meant he would be sick and in pain.

Dr. Gray assured him he could expect a good quality of life. That September, he started taking the new treatment daily, in addition to the other medications included in his treatment plan.

Nearly two years later, when Dr. Gray asked if he'd be interested in Stay Strong, a 12-week program that helps oncology patients regain their strength and well-being, he was ready.

"That first year, when I still thought I was dying, I was afraid to do much of anything," he says. "I was afraid I would hurt myself or wreck something or cause more damage."

The disease had taken a heavy toll on his body. The cancer had woven around the nerves of his lower body and spread to his spine. For a time, he had extreme back pain and couldn't feel his legs or his feet. His strength and endurance were significantly reduced, as were his balance and mobility.

For Mr. McVicar, a busy realtor and extrovert with a severe case of self-diagnosed fear of missing out, it was a sharp decline from his active, social former life.

"We don't live very far from the places we socialize, but for two years, I didn't want to walk, I hopped in the car," he says. "I was afraid I'd be tired. I was just ... afraid."

He hated how he'd lost flexibility in his feet, so when he walked, "they were like a duck's, they'd go plop, plop, plop."

While he had been strong and active pre-cancer, Mr. McVicar says he was never a "gym guy."

"I used to make the joke, 'People get hurt at the gym, I'm not going to the gym,'" he says, chuckling.

But he made an exception for Stay Strong. He's mighty glad he did.

"This is one of the best things I've done," he says.

"The first thing I loved about it was that the people giving

me my program are connected to oncology. They know exactly what's going on with me. That gave me a great deal of confidence. And so, that fear that I would do something that would break or hurt myself was gone."

Two or three times a week, he heads to the Saint John YMCA to walk the track and do his program of cardio, weights, mobility and balance exercises. After just six weeks, he was amazed at his progress.

"It just gives me more confidence and happiness," he says. "Simple as that."

Ms. Gilliland loves to see that, along with regaining his strength, his sense of optimism is returning as well. They're resuming activities they love to share: strolling down the street to meet friends for a drink, hosting dinner parties, having a morning coffee together before work.

"Enjoying life while you're here is so key," she says.

Cancer is devastating to patients but also their families and relationships.

"Behind closed doors, there are a huge number of domestic challenges that come around a cancer diagnosis," she says. "And so you can see how a program like this is beneficial for everybody's peace of mind. Psychologically, what this does for patients and families is incredible."

And, like those comfy armchairs that held her in the sorrowful, surreal early day of their cancer journey together, Stay Strong is primarily funded by donors, whose generosity has meant so much to Ms. Gilliland.

"I'm so incredibly grateful for all the caring people who give to the Saint John Regional Hospital Foundation," she says. "All of the comforts that donors have provided through their gifts benefits patients, their families and the community."

“In this community, we have access to incredible care in such a loving, friendly and welcoming environment.... We don't have to travel for world-class care.”

– Christine Gilliland

In recalling the journey two years after the grim diagnosis, Mr. McVicar speaks with a new strength and hope. His blood work and scans are encouraging.

"They say that the drugs are helping my cancer cells to die and allowing new bone cells to regenerate and grow," he says. "And so here I am."

In October 2021, he was getting ready to hand out Halloween treats to kids in his beloved uptown Saint John neighbourhood and feeling better than he had in a long time. Two years after his diagnosis, he was beginning to embrace the notion of a future, of living more fully.

"Back when I got the news, it occurred to me that I'd already seen my last Christmas, my last summer, my last this, my last that," he says. "Now the third Christmas of the rest of my life is coming up. It's pretty remarkable."



Christine Gilliland & Bob McVicar.

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