THE GREAT OUTDOORS

FEATHERS & PHOTOS WHERE BIRDERS FLOCK
A SHORE THING 6 BEACHES TO ENJOY THIS SUMMER
GET OUT! PARKS, LAKES, TRAILS GALORE
A Breath of Fresh Air

The annual Shore Issue of Monmouth Health & Life focuses on life here at the Monmouth County shore, and as summer approaches, the unmistakable signs that the vaccines are rapidly and dramatically reducing risk for all and the lifting of some COVID-19 restrictions are fostering a renewed sense of optimism in our communities.

Monmouth County’s beaches are a part of the backbone of our state’s economy and our home at Monmouth Medical Center, located just two blocks from the beautiful Long Branch beachfront. While some physical distancing and mask guidelines will remain in place, New Jersey has moved to reopen much of the state. For all of us, this brings hope that we are on a path that returns to wellness, and an undoubtedly sunny outlook on the upcoming summer season at the shore.

The introduction of the vaccine marked a major milestone in our collective recovery from COVID-19, bringing us hope that our community can emerge from this pandemic, enjoying good health and the ability to gather and celebrate life as we have in summers prior to the quarantine. As we celebrate these victories in our fight against COVID-19, I am so incredibly thankful for the role our community has played in helping slow the spread of the virus by following public health guidelines to protect themselves and others. And as we embrace this semblance of normalcy, we are also mindful of those in our community who continue to suffer from long-lasting, lingering effects of the virus.

To help survivors of COVID-19 who have experienced persistent weakness and respiratory symptoms, Monmouth Medical Center has introduced a post-COVID recovery program. On page 28, we introduce you to Matawan’s Pat Guadagno, who was one of the many COVID-19 patients who saw a rapid progression of respiratory failure that required hospitalization. Through our accredited pulmonary rehabilitation program, we are helping patients like Pat improve breathing and lung function to maximize complete recovery.

As we welcome long days of abundant warmth and sunshine at the shore, I would like to wish all of you a safe and healthy summer.

ERIC CARNEY
President and Chief Executive Officer
MONMOUTH MEDICAL CENTER
AND MONMOUTH MEDICAL CENTER SOUTHERN CAMPUS
The Power of Pink

The strength of the community supports Monmouth Medical Center’s oncology services and the hospital’s cancer patients.

“Pink is important to me because it’s everything to patients like us—those who don’t know what tomorrow brings. Those donors help bring a level of comfort and peace and hope.”

Brad Smith, brain cancer survivor

“I had recently turned 52 and had some memory loss problems where I couldn’t tell you my address or where my kids were going to school. It was very scary. I went to get an MRI, and this is where they talked to me about needing surgery. You’ve got a brain tumor, they said. And Dr. Jonathan Lustgarten (chief of MMC’s neurosurgery department) had a team ready to go to work on my brain, and it made me feel very confident. I went through surgery and came out in good condition. I’ve come back and have gone to work. I can go for walks, I can paddleboard on the river. My life is back on track.”

I was so frozen in disbelief, and this nurse who came out of nowhere comforted my child—and that made all the difference in the world. From that moment on, I knew that I could fight.”

Terry Ingram, MMCF board of trustees

“Because of the care and support shown for the Leon Hess Cancer Center, the care I’ve received changed my life. I look forward to seeing everyone this year at Pink.”

Shawna Dempsey, breast cancer survivor

“I was diagnosed in 2017 at the age of 31 with high-grade ductal carcinoma. The cancer journey doesn’t just stop when you have the mastectomy or when you stop your treatments, whether it’s radiation or chemotherapy. It’s with you for the rest of your life. But it’s with you for the rest of your life.”

“Because of the care and support shown for the Leon Hess Cancer Center, we are flexible and resilient, in-person formats. The coronavirus put a hold on many events and social gatherings over the past year, but the power of pink has proven stronger than the pandemic.”

Claire Knopf, Pink co-chair, LHCC council member and chair of Monmouth Medical Center Foundation (MMCF) advisory board member.

“For me, Pink means unity and strength in numbers, and I think it’s a force to be reckoned with. It’s not going anywhere.”

Crystal Morgan, pancreatic and duodenal cancer survivor

“The Power of Pink fundraising events in both virtual and socially distant, in-person formats. The coronavirus put a hold on many events and social gatherings over the past year, but the power of pink has proven stronger than the pandemic.”

Monmouth Medical Center Foundation office at 732.923.6886 or visit mmcevents.org.

JOIN US FOR PINK:
- The fundraiser features tennis, golf, luncheon and boutique. Proceeds from the 2021 Pink Luncheon will help provide evidence-based mind, body and spiritual programs and services to cancer patients and their families through RWJBarnabas Health Family Care & Wellness in Eatontown.
- Monday, Sept. 20 at the Navesink Country Club, Red Bank; call 732.923.6886 for details.

For more information about the Leon Hess Cancer Center events, call the Monmouth Medical Center Foundation office at 732.923.6886 or visit mmcevents.org.

Diagnosed at the age of 21 with high-grade ductal carcinoma on June 30, 2017, Shawna Dempsey notes that from the day she was diagnosed to the day she was cancer free, she could not have asked for a better outcome than what she received at Monmouth Medical Center. She is pictured in this photo from October 2017 in the Monmouth Medical Center’s Breast Oncology Breast Care Pavilion with her breast surgeon, Monmouth Medical Center’s chief of surgery, Dr. and Company Vice, Co. Dr. Raymond Clavenna. Also pictured is Shawna and two other cancer survivors who were successfully treated at MMC and have generously shared their stories.

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Over the past 20 years, the council has raised more than $8 million to advance the hospital’s oncology services. The financial support funded the purchase of state-of-the-art equipment and helps run programming for thousands of patients and families who face a cancer diagnosis.

“These patients deserve the very best quality care as they fight for their lives and their futures,” says Claire Knopf, Pink co-chair, LHCC council member and chair of the MMCF board of trustees.

Here, you’ll briefly meet three cancer patients, each of whom was successfully treated at MMC and has been generously shared their stories.

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And it’s also a lifestyle that Guadagno, a father of three and grandfather of two, nearly had to give up after he contracted the coronavirus in early January. His initial symptoms included shortness of breath and a slight fever, but his health got progressively worse. Just two days after learning he was positive for the virus, he developed pneumonia and was admitted to Monmouth Medical Center (MMC). Guadagno, 67, a diabetic, recalls his experience of being admitted to the hospital with COVID-19: “I was prepared by my doctors for a long road back,” he says. But despite his serious condition, Guadagno was determined to do “whatever it takes to fight this disease”—and he had help every step of the way.

“The entire floor was COVID patients, and each had his or her own room,” he says. “But nurses came in to take vitals and give medications in full haz-mat regalia, and another two remained outside the room to record the stats. They were all positive and encouraging yet completely honest.”

Some nurses even went out of their way to provide comforts. “I remember thinking that I might never get out of here,” he says. But despite his serious condition, Guadagno was determined to do “whatever it takes to fight this disease”—and he had help every step of the way.

Just 10 days after he was admitted, Guadagno’s oxygen levels slowly improved, his fear of being on a ventilator subsided and he was well enough to be discharged with portable oxygen. And two weeks later, he began recovery at MMC. As survivors of severe COVID-19 cases often experience persistent weakness and respiratory symptoms, the hospital’s comprehensive Pulmonary Rehabilitation Program offers a post-COVID recovery program that is safe and effective. For more information or to schedule an appointment at the Joel Opatut Cardiopulmonary Rehabilitation Center at Monmouth Medical Center, call 732.923.7454. Through exercise and education, program participants can become more active and independent. The highly specialized staff works closely with post-COVID patients in developing exercise programs to meet their needs. Exercise regimens are conducted under the supervision of a registered nurse, respiratory therapist and an exercise physiologist. Each participant’s heart rate, blood pressure and oxygen saturation are monitored to measure the body’s response to exercise.

“Once again, I was amazed and encouraged by the commitment and dedication of these workers,” Guadagno says. “I cannot say enough about the program and the staff.”

Just 90 days after he was admitted to MMC, Guadagno received his first COVID vaccination. And today, he no longer requires the portable oxygen to conduct his regular routine, which includes “playing bad golf once a week.”

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TELLING IT LIKE IT IS

Matawan resident Pat Guadagno used Facebook to document his stay as a COVID-19 patient at Monmouth Medical Center earlier this year. Here’s a snapshot of what he wrote:

“Getting amazing care, over-the-top treatment by the Monmouth Medical staff. Extremely caring staff, every one of whom seems to have their own personal COVID stories. I continue to be amazed, humbled and fortunate to be in their presence and under their watch. I learned so much in here. I learned a little about what makes people fearlessly walk into highly dangerous situations to do everything they can to save their brothers and sisters. I am always inspired by the mettle and the courage of the care worker. Thanks again to this incredible group of very special people.”

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Reaching 100 of anything is usually a significant milestone, but it is always an extraordinary achievement in medicine, particularly when it’s the number of patients who receive a life-changing procedure. On May 17, two Monmouth Medical Center (MMC) spine surgeons, Marc Menkowitz, M.D., and Steve Paragioudakis, M.D., reached the century mark of patient cases that used the cutting-edge Globus Medical ExcelsiusGPS robot for minimally invasive spine surgery.

MMC was the second hospital in New Jersey to use the technology, and while dozens of surgeons use the system, few can match Drs. Menkowitz and Paragioudakis’ expertise and experience with it. They perform the majority of their cases together, using the robot to treat patients who suffer from debilitating conditions like degenerative disc disease and spinal stenosis, as well as damaged discs, scoliosis and other back problems.

The ExcelsiusGPS system combines a robotic arm with computer-assisted navigation. CT scan and X-ray images of the spine are taken prior to a procedure. These images are used to create a surgical plan, which helps the physician guide the robotic arm to a specific area of the spine.

The surgeon is able to view the procedure on a monitor, which provides real-time feedback. With this technology, the procedure is more accurate and less invasive than traditional surgery, according to Dr. Menkowitz. “We can be precise to the millimeter,” he says. “Once we navigate to where we want to be in the spine, the system locks us into the surgical pathway.”

Patients benefit from this high-tech surgical system in several ways. Because the procedure is so precise and involves small incisions, there’s less blood loss, tissue damage and scar tissue. Patients recover more quickly and with less pain than with traditional spine surgery, says Dr. Menkowitz. As a result, hospital stays tend to decrease by about a day, on average. Another advantage: The patient is exposed to less radiation during the surgery because fewer X-rays need to be taken to guide the procedures.

Since MMC introduced the ExcelsiusGPS in October 2019, the system has been used in more than 100 spine surgeries performed by Drs. Menkowitz and Paragioudakis—and they are seeing positive results.

“This is the wave of the future,” says Dr. Paragioudakis. “I think all spine surgeries will be done this way eventually.”

To learn more about robotic surgery at Monmouth Medical Center, call 888.724.7123.