

Connections

A newsletter for donors and friends of **niagarahealth**
foundation



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MICHAEL AND PAULA

“We wanted to show our gratitude for getting my life back.”

Niagara Health saved her life.

“I have diverticulitis,” Paula begins. “It’s a gastrointestinal disease that was managed very easily over the years. Whenever it would get bad, I would take antibiotics and my symptoms would clear up within a couple of days.”

During the summer of 2020, however, when the antibiotics were no longer working, Paula’s family doctor recommended she go to Niagara Health’s emergency department. More antibiotics and tests followed before it was determined that Paula would need a Hartmann’s procedure; a surgery where part of the colon is removed, requiring a colostomy bag.

Her admission to the hospital on September 25, 2020 is one of the last things Paula remembers. After that, she can only recall bizarre and vivid nightmares until, eventually, she remembers waking up in the Niagara Falls Intensive Care Unit (ICU) - two months later.

Paula would learn from her husband that her large intestine had burst during surgery and that she went into septic shock. “It is a difficult thing to come to terms with,” Paula explains. “I had to work with a psychologist to get over the grief that I felt for what I had lost, what I didn’t remember.”

“My husband Michael got the call around 2 am and was told that I was in recovery,” but things quickly changed. The doctors explained to him that Paula’s organs had started shutting down because of sepsis. When Michael saw Paula the next morning, he was in complete shock. Paula’s healthcare team recommended that he say his goodbyes.

“She was on life support,” Michael remembers. “After those first few early days, she went into a comatose

state. I was told that her condition was very serious.”

“The statistics around surviving septic shock are bleak, so they wanted him to be prepared for the worst,” explained Paula. And yet, one doctor on her healthcare team had a feeling that it wasn’t her time, yet – her surgeon, Dr. Faisal Hamour.

“He kept telling Michael that I wasn’t going to die,” Paula says. “He believed in me.” **The ICU team fought for Paula’s life and 65 days later, Dr. Hamour would be proven right.** “On December 8, 2020, I got to go home – not to a rehabilitation facility, but home. Being home for Christmas was my biggest wish and everyone called it a Christmas miracle that my wish came true.”

Recovery wasn’t an easy road for Paula. “It was a long process because I was on a ventilator for two months. I couldn’t speak. I initially couldn’t hear because I had air bubbles in my ears. I was so weak that I couldn’t even hold a pen. I was experiencing ICU psychosis, so I had a lot of hallucinations. I weighed 95 pounds. It was a very difficult time,” she says, before adding, “but I survived.”

A big milestone in Paula’s recovery was a second surgery in April, 2021, where the Hartmann’s procedure was reversed, which meant that Paula no longer needed the colostomy bag. While the surgery initially set her back in her recovery, it was a big step in the right direction.

“The stoma had been an ongoing concern, so it was amazing not having to worry about that anymore. And once that was gone, by the summer of 2021, I was just starting to feel like myself again.”

Grateful for the care that Paula received and the support her husband Michael was given throughout those terrifying days and weeks, the couple knew early on that they wanted to show their appreciation in any way possible.

“We wanted to donate to the ICU as a statement that we were grateful for getting my life back. We made a contribution in 2020 and have continued giving ever since. The staff members were amazing. I can’t say enough about the Niagara Falls ICU staff. They are a group of truly dedicated professionals who care. That’s why we continue to donate and help wherever we can.”

Towards the end of her time in the ICU, Paula remembers a day when the physio team had her ready to stand up with a walker. “They walked me around the ICU, and all of the staff came out from whatever they were doing, and they just stood there applauding,” she says with a laugh. “That was really special – for me, but I think it was for them, too.”

Every year, Paula and Michael send a card to Dr. Hamour for the anniversary of her surgery. **“We want him to realize how important he is in our lives and that we’ll never forget his skill, dedication and his belief in me.”**

When Paula thinks of the days in the ICU that she does remember, it is often the seemingly small acts of kindness that stand out to her. The nurse whose gentle touch helped Paula find moments of peace when she felt scared and anxious, the caretaker’s smile, the respirologist’s patience. “Those are the things I recall that are so important to me, and mean the world to me.”

“I hope by sharing my story, I can show the ICU staff how what they did still resonates with me more than four years later. When you go through something like this, it’s just there,” Paula explains. “I don’t have to think about it. I just feel it - their presence with me.”



KEVIN AND HIS DOG PARKER

“Often it’s the little things that can have a really big impact.”

When Kevin’s dog began spending more and more time with him, he started wondering if his cancer might be back. “I am friends with Temple Grandin, an animal behaviourist, and have learned a lot from her over the years,” Kevin explains. “I knew something wasn’t right.”

“In 2018, I needed a surgery after my gastroenterologist saw something unusual on my liver. They were not sure what it was, but when they went in to remove it, they saw that it was cancer and had to remove part of my liver as well as my gallbladder.”

Thankfully, no further treatment was required at the time, but Kevin continued regular check-ups with his oncologist, Dr. Yelamanchili and then with his family doctor. “I was cancer-free until 2023, when I noticed my dog’s behaviour changing. I had just had my usual round of tests, bloodwork and such, and everything had come back clean,” Kevin says, “but I didn’t have symptoms the first time I had cancer; that doesn’t always mean you’re okay.”

Kevin went through possible scenarios in his head and it occurred to him that they had not checked his PSA levels (prostate-specific antigen) in a while.

An abnormal rise in PSA levels can indicate prostate cancer.

“My family doctor ordered the test and sure enough, my levels were high and a biopsy confirmed that it was cancer,” Kevin remembers. His cancer was treated with radiation and he was grateful for his Radiation Oncologist Dr. Eric Nguyen “He was so efficient and caring.”

Today, Kevin feels great and continues to check in with his oncologist Dr. Wasserman every few months. “Dr. Wasserman is also a wonderful caregiver,” says Kevin, who made a *Gift of Gratitude* in honour of the treatment he received at the Walker Family Cancer Centre.

"One of the principles at my last corporate job as Vice President was that good performers will be rewarded, and that is how I think of philanthropy as well," Kevin explains about his decision to donate to the Niagara Health Foundation.

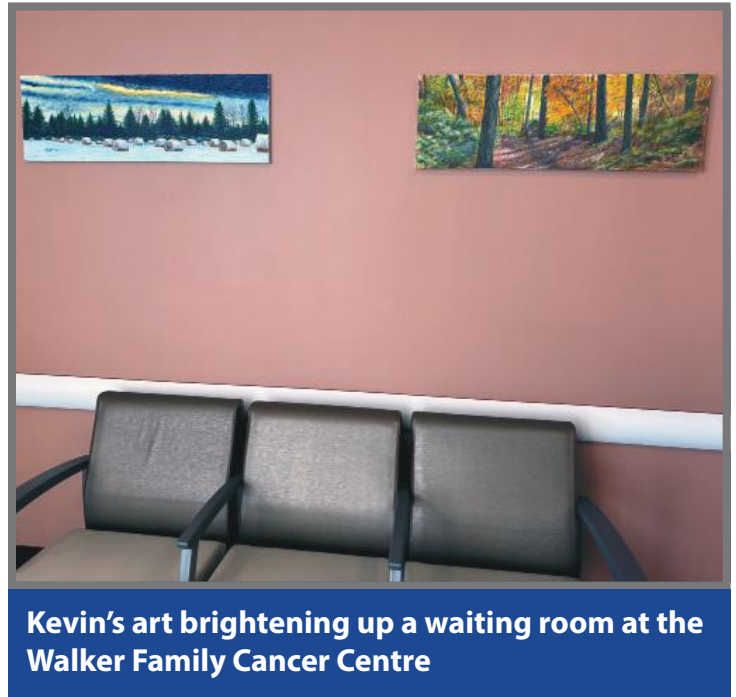
"I see the great work the healthcare workers are doing at Niagara Health and I want to reward them for that work." Another team member who stood out to Kevin is Heather, one of Niagara Health's Technologists in Diagnostic Imaging. "I have needed many CT scans over the past years and Heather is exceptional. She is the epitome of the type of person that you want working at a hospital, so I honoured her with a donation as well."

Kevin has also made the generous decision to join the Niagara Health Foundation Legacy Society and is leaving a gift to the Niagara Health Foundation in his Will. "One of my favourite quotes is by George Bernard Shaw: *"People are always blaming circumstances for what they are. I don't believe in circumstances. The people who get on in this world are the people who get up and look for the circumstances they want and, if they cannot find them, they make them."* That is how I have lived my life. A quote like this can be a beacon that keeps you on the right path for a lifetime."

Including Niagara Health Foundation in his estate plan is one of the ways Kevin creates the right circumstances. "I am limited in what I can give now because you just never know what is going to happen, but a Legacy Gift is something I can commit to. I have talked to my wife about it to ensure she knows my intentions."

For now, Kevin hopes that day is still far away, and he enjoys his beautiful garden and painting. "One of the other ways I support Niagara Health is through my art," Kevin says, and adds that he has donated several paintings to the hospital.

"I myself am very good at handling stress, but when I was going through radiation, I could see individuals who were facing an enormous amount of unknown, and that it was creating tremendous anxiety for them."



What I'm hoping is that maybe when they're looking at an ocean scene in the Walker Family Cancer Centre, or when the kids in the Children's Health Unit look at my painting of a lion cub, that it takes their minds off of everything, even if just for a few minutes. **Maybe, for a brief moment, it can shift the patient's mindset."**

We are deeply grateful for Kevin's support of our local hospitals. He has changed the world in many ways over the course of his life, and he believes other people can, too.

"Often it's little things that can have a really big impact. It's simple," he says. "You just do the right thing."

YOUR DONATIONS AT WORK



Thanks to your donations, the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) has new phototherapy lights for our tiniest patients.

Since their livers are not fully developed yet, premature babies are often jaundiced. The special blue light emitted by the phototherapy lamp is absorbed by the baby's skin, and gives them the little bit of extra help they need.

"We are so thankful for this new equipment," says Laura Harsevoort, Manager of the NICU and Children's Health. "It allows us to provide the best possible care to the babies in the NICU."

In the past year alone, Niagara Health provided phototherapy to 314 babies across the Post Partum, Neonatal and Children's Health Units.

Another amazing piece of equipment that was purchased in January was a surgical C-Arm. It is a specialized real-time medical imaging device that is used by vascular surgeons at Niagara Health.

The "C" shape allows the imaging device to rotate around the patient during surgery, capturing images from different perspectives.

"The addition of the new unit will create much needed capacity, supporting Niagara Health's goal to decrease wait times," says Susan Kinnear, Manager of Diagnostic Imaging. "It will benefit thousands of patients in the region. Thank you for this generous and valuable donation."



EXCITING THINGS ARE HAPPENING AT THE WALKER FAMILY CANCER CENTRE

Thanks to your incredible generosity, an aging linear accelerator is currently being replaced with a brand new model. Our team has been working on the radiation bunker renovations for months, and we are so pleased to share that this equipment will soon be available to patients here in Niagara. It is designed to deliver radiation therapy with incredible accuracy, focusing on cancerous areas while protecting nearby healthy tissue. This state-of-the-art equipment is especially helpful for patients needing a second round of radiation as it can carefully shape the radiation to avoid areas that were already treated.



In December, the linear accelerator arrived on-site and installation began.



In January, the installation team started preparing the machine for patient use.



This winter, we had an extra special visit from siblings Paolo and Tessa who both asked for donations to Niagara Health Foundation for their birthdays. While Paolo did the same for the Walker Family Cancer Centre last year, for Tessa this was her first time. "I am turning 8," she told us, "and I had a party with my friends last weekend. I asked all of them to bring donations instead of gifts."

Paolo chose to support the Walker Family Cancer Centre again, and Tessa's donation went towards urgent equipment needs at the Children's Health Unit. "I don't want young kids to be sick," Tessa said with a proud smile. Thank you so much for your kindness, Tessa & Paolo.



The second annual Run for Niagara, held in Niagara Falls, was a tremendous success, raising an incredible \$4,000 in support of Niagara Health Foundation. This community-driven event brought together runners, walkers, and supporters, all united by a common goal - to make a difference in local healthcare. We thank our friends at Ahmadiyya Muslim Youth Association Canada for their continued support!

WORMALD MASSE KEEN LOPINSKI LLP JOINS *IT'S OUR FUTURE* CAMPAIGN



It is with deep gratitude that we share that Wormald Masse Keen Lopinski LLP (WMKL), a local accounting firm, has pledged \$150,000 towards the *It's Our Future* campaign in support of the new South Niagara hospital.

"Most of us grew up in the Niagara region," says Steve Sakes, who has been a partner at WMKL since 2015. "When I first started here, we were a team of just 20. Today, we've grown to more than 80, and a big part of that growth is our connection to Brock University. Many of our team members come from across Niagara, and we all share a strong tie to the region. This is where we were raised, where our families live, and why supporting local charities is so important to us."

Access to quality healthcare close to home matters to everyone, Sakes adds. "Our local hospitals impact all of us, which makes this an important cause for WMKL." In recognition of this generous donation, the Diagnostic Imaging waiting room in the emergency department of the new hospital will be named after WMKL.

We extend our gratitude to Steve and everyone at WMKL for their commitment to local healthcare!



The Fit Collective Community continues to step up for the Walker Family Cancer Centre. Over the course of only two years, their events have raised over \$90,000 for local cancer care.

Located in Fonthill, Ontario, Fit Collective Studio and The Yard Social Club have become shining examples of community spirit and dedication. In 2023, owner Ashley Mathewson and co-event organizer Paul Scheib approached the Niagara Health Foundation with the intent to give back to the Walker Family Cancer Centre, motivated by personal experiences and a desire to support cancer care in the region.

From this shared vision, two unique events have raised over \$90,000 for the Walker Family Cancer Centre. In 2023, they hosted a Survival Challenge, a grueling 24-hour challenge where teams of six pushed a weighted sled for 24 consecutive hours, raising a remarkable \$44,582.

The following year, in 2024, they organized FITSTOCK, a 24-hour relay event where teams walked a five kilometre route non-stop, raising an additional \$40,597. These outstanding efforts have not gone unnoticed.

As a symbol of our appreciation, two rooms at the Walker Family Cancer Centre have been named in their honour: the Staff Wellness Room and the Radiation Treatment Room.

Ashley and Paul's amazing leadership and hands-on involvement were instrumental in making these events a success, from coordinating logistics and securing sponsorships to organizing meals and entertainment. Their unwavering commitment has made a lasting impact on the cancer care provided to families in Niagara.

We also want to extend our deepest gratitude to the entire Fit Collective community, whose passion and generosity continue to make a lasting impact. To Ashley, Paul, and everyone who participated, donated, and supported these initiatives - your contributions are truly making a difference in the lives of cancer patients and their families.

Rankin Cancer Run - Back In Person



The Rankin Cancer Run is back in person this year for the first time since the COVID-19 pandemic! This cherished community event will take place **Saturday, May 24, 2025, at Brock University**, offering a meaningful opportunity to come together in support of cancer care in Niagara.

Since its inception, the Rankin Cancer Run has raised over \$12.6 million for cancer care in Niagara. \$5.9 million of those funds have supported urgent equipment needs as well as cancer research at the Walker Family Cancer Centre.

This year, there are two ways to participate. You can join in person at Brock University or take part virtually by creating your own Rankin Cancer Run. Whether you choose to run, walk, or volunteer, your participation will help make a real difference in the lives of cancer patients and their families in Niagara. **Sign up at rankincancerrun.com to participate, volunteer, or donate.**

Safari Niagara's Day In The Park



Safari Niagara is once again bringing the community together for a day of fun and philanthropy at their second annual Day In The Park in support of the Niagara Health Foundation. After an incredible first year, which raised \$10,000 for the South Niagara hospital, this year's event will direct proceeds towards the Children's Health Unit at the Marotta Family Hospital.

We hope to see you on June 21st! Tickets will be available online at **SafariNiagara.com** starting in May.

Upcoming Events

East Coast Kitchen Party *May 13, 2025*

M.T. Bellies in Welland

In support of the Welland Hospital

Rankin Cancer Run *May 24, 2025*

Brock University

In support of the Walker Family Cancer Centre

Kids Ultimate Challenge *June 7, 2025*

Burgoyne Woods

In support of the Children's Health Unit

Niagara Golf Marathon *June 9, 2025*

Sawmill Golf Course

In support of urgent equipment needs

Fight Prostate Golf Tournament *June 14, 2025*

Rockway Vineyards Golf Course

In support of the Walker Family Cancer Centre

Big Move Cancer Ride *September 14, 2025*

White Meadows Farms

In support of the Walker Family Cancer Centre

Thank you for your generous support!

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