

Connections

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



Read about Abbey Gooder's
fight on and off the court

SPRING | 2026



ABBEY

“Cancer is a scary word to hear.”

Abbey believes in showing up. For her team, her community, and herself.

At 22 years old, she should have been focused on finishing her final year of college: graduating alongside friends, competing with her volleyball team, and planning her next chapter.

Instead, one unexpected moment with friends changed everything.

“I was spending time with friends,” Abbey remembers. “They pointed out this lump on my throat, and I was surprised that I had never noticed it before.”

She decided to get it checked out.

“My doctor ordered an ultrasound, and when those results came back, it was clear that something wasn’t right.”

Abbey was referred to Niagara Health physician Dr. Robichaud, who performed the biopsy. The procedure confirmed her worst fears. “They found cancer in my thyroid.”

“When I was told by my doctor that it was cancer, I was scared, of course. Cancer is a scary word to hear. I was worried about volleyball as well because it is such a big part of my life. Everything was unknown at that point.”

Abbey was scheduled for surgery, and had her thyroid and two cancerous lymph nodes removed in December.

“The healthcare workers were amazing. They were so helpful and answered all the questions I had. They were right by my side.”

When her Niagara College Knights volleyball team first heard about Abbey’s diagnosis, they knew they wanted to help.



Abbey and her friends after surgery

They set up a meal train for her weeks of recovery and sent her gift cards.

"The support from my team has been incredible. After the surgery, they reached out to me and told me that they would like to put on a fundraiser for the Walker Family Cancer Centre (WFCC)."

As soon as the idea was born, her coaches, teammates, and Niagara College staff came together to put on the "Thumbs Down to Cancer" fundraiser, held in January.

"They sold tickets for the game, put on a raffle and sold stickers and bracelets. It was amazing. I was cleared to play just in time for the event, which made the game extra special for me."

The event raised over \$5,500, and when the Ontario Colleges Athletic Association heard about the event and Abbey's diagnosis, they added another \$2,000 to the fundraising total.

Keeping the money raised in her community was important to Abbey.

"Cancer affects many, many people every single day. It has impacted my mom, my family, and me. Cancer is one of the worst things in the world, so if donating to the WFCC can make things even just a little better for patients here in our community, then it is something we need to do."

Niagara Health Foundation President & CEO, Andrea Scott, is grateful for this significant donation in support of local cancer care.

"Abbey's coaches and teammates not only showed up for one of their own, but they showed up for every person battling cancer here in our region."

Today, Abbey continues to recover from her surgery and has blood work done regularly to ensure the cancer hasn't spread. She is excited to return to the Knights as an Assistant Coach after graduation.

"Volleyball is everything to me, and I will do my best to stay positive. Things can change so quickly, and you have no control over that, but staying positive and taking care of myself are things I can control, so that is what I will focus on."





JAMES AND DANIEL

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

After Leanne Wright’s son Daniel was born, he had to stay in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) for five days.

“It had been a pretty typical pregnancy,” Leanne says. “When they scheduled a C-section, I wasn’t concerned. Daniel was measuring big and they wanted to be on the safe side.”

Leanne prepared for her baby’s arrival and was excited to meet him. “The surgery went fine, but when they held Daniel, they noticed that something was off about his breathing. They tried to suction out his lungs, but it didn’t seem to work. And then,” Leanne adds, “they rushed him to the NICU.”

The hours that followed are a blur of worrying about Daniel and recovering from her own surgery.

“It was hard that we couldn’t see him right away, and when we did see him, he was a lot sicker than we thought,” she explains.

“It was very emotional. He was just so little with all the tubes... it was difficult to see him like that.”

“You obviously know that things can go wrong, but you never really think it’s going to happen to you.”

Between the clinical setting and the flood of medical terms, Leanne felt overwhelmed.

“I remember the moment when a nurse came in and started writing on the whiteboard in Daniel’s room. She started writing goals for Daniel on the board,” her voice breaks.

“She wrote things like ‘stay cute’ and there was something so personal and compassionate about that. He turned from ‘Baby Wright’ into a real person in that moment.”



Baby Daniel had to spend five days at Niagara Health's Neonatal Intensive Care Unit

"It was also the first time we could see that he would be progressing."

The nurse calmly explained that Daniel's lungs were underdeveloped and talked Leanne through the next steps.

"Seeing those small, achievable goals on the whiteboard made me feel like we had a plan. We don't know how long it will take, but we can figure it out."

Leanne describes their time at the NICU as a roller coaster of emotions. "He had good days and bad days, but slowly, he started checking those boxes on the whiteboard."

His big brother James was excited to meet Daniel, and thanks to the nurses, who gave him things like colouring books and a teddy bear, he felt empowered

to be there for his brother instead of being scared for him.

"I don't think the team at the NICU realizes how much of an impact they have on families. I had this idea of how my first days with our newborn were going to go – all those special firsts and moments of bonding – and instead, we were in a clinical setting, in an environment where days just blur into one another."

"I don't know how we would have done it without the constant check-ins and encouragement from the nurses."

"At the NICU, you don't really know how the situation is going to turn out, and that is an incredibly heavy burden to carry. If I didn't have supportive, caring nurses, it could easily have felt too hard and overwhelming. Having their reassurance and those personal touches made the experience so much less traumatic than it could have been."

Leanne is grateful for their care team and the donors who give them the tools to help patients like Daniel.

"I don't think I'll ever forget the care they have given to us. They went beyond their basic duties, and it has made us feel more human."

After five long days, Leanne was finally able to bring Daniel home.

"It was the best feeling," she beams. "I couldn't stop smiling. There are no words to describe the joy I felt that day. I was elated."

As grateful as she was – and forever will be – for the care they received, she was also quite happy to walk out of the hospital that day. "I didn't want to look back," she laughs. "We're out of here!"

Life-saving New Equipment for Surgeries

The surgical team is thankful for the new Rapid Infuser purchased thanks to Niagara Health Foundation donors. "In an emergency, this is the equipment you want," says Matty Mayster, registered nurse.

"When severe, sudden blood loss occurs during surgery, this device is life-saving," he explains.

"We always have the Rapid Infusers available during surgery because you cannot predict when you are going to need one. We may need it three times a week, we may need it three times a day."

Whenever the surgical team has to use it, he adds, time is of the essence.

"Blood provides oxygen to the brain, so when there is major blood loss, that is our main concern."

Quick, easy equipment assembly is important when every second counts. **The new Rapid Infuser uses high pressure and wider tubing to deliver blood to the patient as quickly as possible.**

"It also includes a warming unit, which brings the blood up to body temperature as it flows into the patient."

"With this brand-new technology, we can deliver many units of blood very quickly, and we are grateful to every donor who made this life-saving purchase possible."



Matty Mayster loves the complexity of his work and is grateful for the new Rapid Infuser that is used in emergency situations in the operating rooms

Lab Stainers for Cancer Diagnostics

The laboratory plays a crucial role in diagnosing and treating patients at Niagara Health, although the work often takes place behind the scenes.

Earlier this year, Niagara Health Foundation donors raised \$379,730 for the purchase of two state-of-the-art Immunohistochemistry Stainers, which are an important tool for diagnosing cancer.

Whenever a physician orders a biopsy, the sample goes to the laboratory, where the stainer helps the pathologist see abnormalities in the tissue. Sheila Martel, senior registered technologist, was among the first team members trained to use the new device.

“By applying dye to the samples, the stainer helps identify certain biomarkers. The pathologist uses that information to diagnose specific types of cancer,” she explains. “It can also inform which course of treatment the patient will best respond to.”

The new device has faster processing, reducing the time it takes to deliver the answers patients are looking for.

“Everybody has been touched by cancer,” Sheila says. “We want to do what we can to reduce the time people spend waiting for results and answers. Even the smallest time savings here in the lab have a ripple effect.”

Vani Vyas, charge technologist, agrees. “We process approximately 150 samples a day. Having the stainer in-house has a remarkable impact on our turnaround time and, by extension, on patients. Beyond our team’s gratitude, I know patients are grateful as well.”

Patient care and providing people with answers during difficult times is at the heart of their work, Sheila and Vani explain.

“We want to thank Niagara Health Foundation donors for making a difference in people’s lives.”



Lab Stainers: \$ 379,730

Everything they do at the laboratory has a significant impact on patient care, explain Vani Vyas and Sheila Martel.

“We want to thank Niagara Health Foundation donors for making a difference in people’s lives.”

Beam Signing for the South Niagara Hospital

South Niagara Hospital marked a major construction milestone in the 12-storey, 475 bed, \$3.6-billion project.

On Feb. 25, 2026, the final structural beam was installed. Niagara Health held a ceremonial “beam signing” event that saw donors, community members and the Premier of Ontario come together in celebration.

Less than three years ago, the community joined Niagara Health and the Niagara Health Foundation on an empty field at the corner of Montrose and Biggar roads in Niagara Falls to break ground on what will become the future of hospital care in Niagara.

The beam signing was a symbol of collaboration, shared commitment, and the significant investment by government, donors, and community partners to deliver a state-of-the-art hospital that will serve Niagara for generations to come.

“Every signature on this beam represents the collective strength of a community that believes in better care for its neighbours,” says Niagara Health Foundation President & CEO, Andrea Scott.

“This project is possible because of the generosity of our donors and the unwavering support of individuals, families and organizations that stepped forward to make a difference. Their commitment is helping build not just a hospital, but a place of healing, hope and possibility for everyone who will walk through its doors.”

At seven metres long, the beam carries the signatures of thousands of individuals who have played a role in bringing this project to life, including construction workers, healthcare staff, physicians, patients, donors and community members.



Walker Industries Announces \$2 Million Gift to the South Niagara Hospital

We sat down with President & CEO, Geordie Walker, to learn more about this incredibly generous gift.

What motivated you to support to the new South Niagara Hospital?

Walker has been committed for 5 generations to give back in the communities that we call home, and we have been calling Niagara home for almost 140 years.

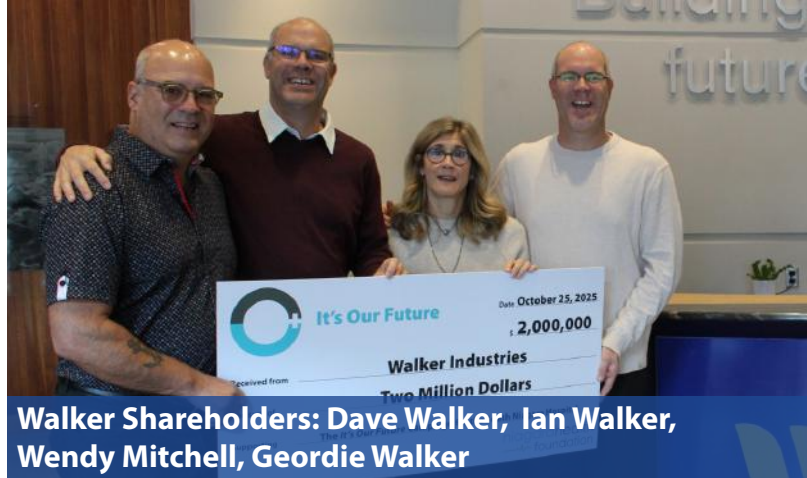
Given the amazing scale, importance, and innovation at this new hospital, we felt that we should support it.

The family and company heritage is ingrained in Niagara, and as we continue to grow alongside the community, it is important that we continue to support the well-being of our neighbours, employees, and their families and this hospital was certainly a once-in-a-generation opportunity to do that.

This generous gift will support the Hemodialysis Unit. Why did you choose this area specifically?

Kidney care is essential, and we were inspired by the innovation that this unit will have available for the residents of Niagara Falls.

Personally, a family member received excellent care in this area of medicine, and it meant a great deal to us as a family to honour that care by supporting the South Niagara Hospital to continue to do that.



Walker Shareholders: Dave Walker, Ian Walker, Wendy Mitchell, Geordie Walker

Do you have a message to inspire others to support the "It's Our Future" Campaign?

As the Niagara region continues to grow, so does the need to improve its infrastructure and services available in Niagara Falls.

Supporting the *It's Our Future* Campaign helps secure much needed improvements in senior care, stroke care, and complex care while becoming the beacon in Canada for leading-edge healthcare.

This facility will expand care for our families, friends and neighbours for generations to come, which is something I believe we can all take tremendous pride in and support.

What do you wish everyone knew about giving to the Niagara Health Foundation?

Working to support the incredible team at the Walker Family Cancer Centre, Walker is fortunate to have built a strong relationship with the Niagara Health Foundation.

The most important thing to know when giving to the Foundation is that you can trust its commitment to ensuring every contribution makes a meaningful difference for our neighbours in need of care.

Celebrating our Community Partners

Fallsview Casino Slot Voucher Program



At Fallsview Casino Resort and Casino Niagara, a simple idea has quickly grown into meaningful community impact.

Through the Slot Voucher Donation Program, guests are invited to donate their unused vouchers in conveniently placed bins at the exits of the gaming floor or select the option to contribute their spare

Funding Innovations Art Easels

For more than 11 years, Funding Innovations has been bringing a creative twist to fundraising for the Niagara Health Foundation.

Through their Art Easel Program, local businesses host art easels where customers can place bids on featured pieces. This initiative has raised more than \$105,000 to support urgent healthcare needs at Niagara Health.

Each bid gives participants a chance to take home a unique piece of art while contributing to a great cause.

change directly at the redemption machines. It's an easy gesture, one that takes only a moment, but the results have been extraordinary.

In just eight months, more than \$55,000 has been raised in support of Niagara Health Foundation and the new South Niagara Hospital.

These funds advance the build of this transformational healthcare facility for our region.

For our donors and community partners, this program is a powerful example of how collective generosity, even in small amounts, can come together to create significant impact. We are deeply grateful to Fallsview Casino Resort, Casino Niagara and its guests for helping move the South Niagara Hospital fundraising efforts forward and strengthening healthcare for families across Niagara.

Interested in hosting an Art Easel?

Niagara Health Foundation is looking to expand the Art Easel program to more locations.

Please visit our website to learn more or host an easel at your business:

NiagaraHealthFoundation.com/ArtEasel

Liebling Wines Gives Back



This year, Liebling Wines partnered with the Walker Family Cancer Centre (WFCC) to give back in a meaningful way.

Founded by sisters Ali and Jess Oppenlaender, this small-batch, family-run winery pledged \$1 from every bottle sold of their 2023 Sauvignon Blanc to the WFCC.

Thanks to the support of wine lovers across the region, the promotion raised a total of \$1,780 to help cancer patients and their families.

The initiative was deeply personal for the family. Their mother, along with close family friends, has received care at the WFCC in recent years, and Ali and Jess wanted to express their heartfelt gratitude for the exceptional care and support their loved ones experienced.

Liebling Wines carries forward a proud family legacy that began with their father, Matthias Oppenlaender, who planted the family's first vineyard in Queenston in 1984 after immigrating from Germany. At a time when growing vinifera grapes in Ontario was considered a bold risk, his vision and dedication laid the foundation for a thriving, family-run business.

Today, under Ali and Jess's leadership, Liebling Wines continues to craft small-batch wines that reflect the region, the family's passion, and a commitment to giving back to the community.

Upcoming Events

Rankin Cancer Run

May 24, 2026

Brock University

In support of the Walker Family Cancer Centre

RankinCancerRun.com

Kids Ultimate Challenge

June 6, 2026

Firemen's Park

In support of the Children's Health Unit

KidsUltimateChallenge.com

Niagara Golf Marathon

June 8, 2026

Sawmill Golf Course

In support of urgent equipment needs

NiagaraGolfMarathon.com

Mayor Jim's Community BBQ

August 9, 2026

St. George Serbian Orthodox Church

In support of the South Niagara Hospital

Big Move Cancer Ride

September 13, 2026

White Meadows Farms

In support of the Walker Family Cancer Centre

BigMoveCancerRide.com

Thank you for your generous support!

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