

Ideas from Our Top Team Captains to Help You Fundraise

We are honored and lucky to have team captains who have been involved in the LA Cancer Challenge for many years. Each year, they passionately recommit to fundraising in honor of their loved ones. These are not your conventional fundraisers, so we wanted to share some of their tips, strategies, and advice in the hopes that they will help you boost your fundraising.

1. Commit a few minutes each day to fundraising.
2. Send at least **one** request every day and several on some days.
3. Reach out to everyone you can think of.
4. Start with a group email. But then keep the follow-ups personal. You can send updates in a group email, but once someone donates, don't continue to email them with more requests.
5. Snail mail! Is there someone you think isn't getting your emails or isn't responding? Send a letter in the mail. Plus, it gives a personal touch.
6. Share the facts that will inspire donors. Here's a great example of how to really show the impact of pancreatic cancer.
7. *Total Deaths in 2023 from Motor Vehicle Crashes: 40,990*
8. *Total Deaths in 2023 from Gun Violence (Including Suicides): 46,728*
9. *Breast Cancer Deaths This Year (2024): 42,780*
10. *Pancreatic Cancer Deaths This Year (2024): 51,750*
11. Always customize your personal and team URL. For photos, especially if you honor more than one person, make a collage of photos to upload to your page.
12. Make your own offline donation form for those who may want

to or need to pay by check.

13. Do **not** get discouraged when you don't get a response to a donation request. Instead, continue to think of other ways to reach that potential donor.
14. End your letters and emails with an impassioned plea like "Pancreatic cancer isn't going to go away on its own, and it isn't going to slow down, and it's our responsibility to do everything we can because, at the end of the day, there's no one else but us."

Do you have any great tips of your own? We'd love to hear how you're making a difference and what works best for your fundraising! Email us at info@pancreatic.org

27th Annual LACC Honorary Starter is 9-Year Pancreatic Cancer Survivor, Tom Arai!

The Hirshberg Foundation is thrilled to introduce Tom, our Honorary Starter for this year's 27th Annual LA Cancer Challenge. Tom's story is one of remarkable resilience, determination, and hope—a true testament to the spirit of our pancreatic cancer community.

Nine years ago, at 65 years old, Tom received a diagnosis that would change his life: stage 4 pancreatic cancer. At that time, the five-year survival rate was less than 3%, so Tom focused on one day at a time, maintaining a remarkable attitude and calm demeanor that inspired everyone around him.

Throughout his journey, Tom's wife, Toni, has been a pillar of support. Once diagnosed, she tirelessly researched to find a great medical oncologist, which led them to Dr. Tara Seery, who they deeply respect and admire.

Immediately after his diagnosis, Tom began a clinical trial that would ultimately change the course of his disease. Through his medical team's dedication and unwavering commitment to treatment, Tom achieved what many thought was impossible. Following the trial, he was considered to have no detectable cancer—a moment of triumph and hope for him and his loved ones. Today, at 74, Tom takes Lynparza, a maintenance chemotherapy drug. His youthful spirit and positivity have kept him strong and made him a beacon of hope for others facing similar battles.

Driven by the challenges he's experienced and inspired by the incredible support he's received; Tom has dedicated himself to giving back. Encouraged by his primary care physician, he started talking to other patients to offer insight, tips, and support. Before long, with another survivor, he founded a weekly Zoom support group for pancreatic cancer patients and caregivers across the U.S., creating a space for sharing experiences and building a community of strength and solidarity.

Before his diagnosis, Tom was an avid cyclist for 25 years, riding up to 20 miles daily. His passion for cycling kept him physically fit and mentally strong, preparing him for the battle ahead. In 2018, Tom took a leap of faith—literally—when he jumped out of an airplane with other pancreatic cancer survivors to celebrate their shared journey. Refusing to let pancreatic cancer take away their enjoyment of life and adventure, Tom and his fellow survivors went skydiving in Perris, California.

Before the LACC 5k race begins, Tom will take the stage to share his journey, offering all participants words of wisdom and

encouragement. His story is about surviving, thriving, and finding joy and purpose every day. He embodies the message that while cancer can change the course of our lives, it does not define who we are or limit what we can achieve.

We invite you to join us at the LA Cancer Challenge, not only to support pancreatic cancer research but also to be inspired by individuals like Tom. Whether you are running, walking, or cheering from the sidelines, your participation makes a difference in the fight against pancreatic cancer.

Tom's story is a beacon of hope and a testament to the progress in cancer research and treatment. Let his journey inspire you to push through your challenges and support those fighting theirs. See you at the starting line!

21-Year Pancreatic Cancer Survivor, Roberta Luna to be Honorary Starter for the 26th LA Cancer Challenge

As the Hirshberg Foundation brings our vibrant community of supporters and fundraisers together for the [26th LA Cancer Challenge](#), we are thrilled to share that this year's Honorary Starter will be 21-year pancreatic cancer survivor, Roberta Luna!

For two decades, Roberta and her beloved husband Vic have been on a crusade to give back to their community and to embrace

patients and caregivers going through a journey that the Lunas know all too well. “Through my experience with this horrific disease, I believe I am here to help those who have also been affected by pancreatic cancer, to hopefully inspire them and give them much needed hope.” Putting her beliefs into action, Roberta is a volunteer, activist, patient advocate, guest speaker at awareness events and survivor panelist at the Hirshberg Foundation’s Symposium for Pancreatic Cancer. This year we are thrilled to welcome her as our LACC Honorary Starter, and we invite you to [register and join us](#) too!

Over the years, Roberta has shared her harrowing story of how pancreatic cancer took her father, her mother and her uncle before impacting her own personal health by her early 40’s. “I decided then and there I wasn’t going to die; I was going to fight this with everything I had.” Every step of the way, Roberta has stood strong as an advocate for patients. Most recently, she has given a voice to fellow survivors through her podcast: [Living Hope; Your Journey with Pancreatic Cancer](#). Living Hope is a weekly podcast sharing the real-life journeys of those affected by this disease. Her goal is to educate, raise awareness, provide hope, and a spark of inspiration for survivors and caregivers. The [Living Hope](#) podcast is also a returning sponsor of the LA Cancer Challenge this year.

Today, Roberta instills hope in newly diagnosed patients and long-term survivors alike. “Hopefully, you find inspiration from my story about how, through the good, the bad and the ugly, we can weather the storm with the support of our loved ones, our family, ‘our purple family’ and the many people we meet along this often-difficult journey.”

We are honored and humbled to call her a friend of the Foundation. As the Hirshberg Foundation shares its LACC mantra to “Fight to the Finish,” there are no better words than a quote

Roberta shared years ago. “As I lace up my purple boxing gloves for the 19th time, I challenge pancreatic cancer to put on its gloves and prepare for the next round...I am still standing and I’m not giving up!”

A Superhuman Dad’s Life & Legacy Live on Through his Son

By: Scott Meller

I’ll never forget the day, it was May 5, 2015, the day before my 39th birthday. I was at work at Feldmar Watch Company with my father, as had been the case 6 days a week for the past 22 years of my life. My father had been feeling ill with a stomachache for about a week. He had gone in for a gastroenterologist appointment but there was no reason to believe it was anything serious, it was a stomachache. His doctor called and requested that he come into the office at 3:00pm. When he returned to our store at around 5pm he asked me to join him in our private office.

We sat down and he proceeded to tell me that he had just been told he had pancreatic cancer. I sat there, stunned by the news, while he explained that he didn’t know much yet, but that we’d learn more in the coming days as he began his battle with pancreatic cancer. He finished what he was telling me and left for home. I sat alone in our office, holding my head in my hands, tears running down my cheeks and a million thoughts swirling through my mind. Nothing was clear other than the distinct feeling that the lifelong security blanket my dad

created by always being there for me was suddenly yanked away. It wasn't the pain that he was gone, or that he had given up hope, it was the overwhelming sadness that nothing would be the same, ever again.

Over the following days, he had procedures to prepare him for his cancer treatments. He began his first round of chemotherapy, and after 8 weeks, we received news that the tumor had shrunk. The doctor tempered our enthusiasm about this news with the fact that shrinkage, while always good news in reference to tumors, is common during the first round of treatment, but not necessarily a sign of things to come. Sure enough, after completing the second round of chemotherapy, we received news that the tumor was no longer reacting positively to that treatment and that a more aggressive type of chemotherapy would be needed.

Looking back, I can see this was the beginning of the end. My father began his more aggressive treatment and really struggled. After each session he would become exceptionally sick and weak, requiring three to four days just to return to a mere shadow of himself. After a few sessions, he became so sick and weak that the cancer treatments were postponed until his "health" and strength improved. I remember one specific day when he asked me to join him and his wife for a doctor's visit. He needed extra help getting in and out of the car, and a strong hand to hold while walking for balance. During the chat with the doctor, he told my father that he needed to eat in order to build up his strength or he would die. The visit concluded and we returned to their house. I was helping my father out of his car, holding onto him with him holding onto me so he wouldn't fall. We were face to face so I took the opportunity to tell him, "dad, you need to eat." He replied, "I can't." He loved food! It wasn't that he didn't want to eat, it was that eating made him so sick.

Over the next few weeks his condition continued to deteriorate. In just six short months after he was diagnosed, my dad, the superhuman, perfectly healthy and incredibly strong man, had been reduced to a mere shadow of himself by this horrific disease. In the early evening of November 30th, I played his favorite song for him, held my phone on the pillow close to his ear so he could hopefully hear, I held his hand, and I spoke the words, "dad, it's okay, go ahead and go." And he did, he took his last breath at 6:25pm.

After some time had passed, having spent many months thinking about him, remembering and recalling so many memories, there was one thought that came to mind and has stuck with me ever since. The day he uttered the words, *I can't* to me. It was the only time, in my entire life, that I ever heard him say those two words. Pancreatic cancer had broken the unbreakable, it had taken my superhuman dad.

Scott connected with the Hirshberg's Patient & Family Support Coordinator, sharing a story of heartbreak followed by steady resolve to help find a cure for pancreatic cancer in honor of his dad. Soon after, he gathered a team of employees and loved ones for the [LA Cancer Challenge](#) as Team Sol Meller, in honor of his superhuman father.

To-date, Scott's LACC team has fundraised over \$74,000 thanks to loved ones and employees from the [Feldmar Watch Company](#). Since joining the LACC, Team Sol Meller has consistently been a top fundraising team. Scott refuses to give up and continues to honor his dad's memory, by sharing Sol's story, through his LACC team, and by continuing to raise awareness.

[Read inspiring tributes](#) > [Share Your Story](#) >

Stories from families & friends touched by pancreatic cancer often show the resilience and courage of the human spirit. Loved

ones dedicate their time and effort every day to fight for a cancer-free future and every journey helps pave the way to a cure. Share your story, make a dedication and help raise awareness today.

President of UCLA Health named Honorary Medical Co-Chair at the 25th LA Cancer Challenge

It is a privilege to welcome Johnese Spisso, MPA, President of UCLA Health and CEO of the UCLA Hospital System to serve as the Honorary Medical Co-Chair at the 25th LA Cancer Challenge. As the Hirshberg Foundation and the LA Cancer Challenge commemorate 25 years of research progress and patient support for the pancreatic cancer community, we are appreciative of our deep partnership with UCLA Health.

Johnese Spisso joins [Dr. John Mazziotta](#), Vice Chancellor of UCLA Health Sciences and CEO of UCLA Health, to serve as co-chair for the LA Cancer Challenge. **This joint honor captures the holistic approach to patient support and research that have been tenets of the Hirshberg Foundation's partnership with UCLA.** Since 1997, the Hirshberg Foundation has emphasized patient care alongside research, investing in treatment that span the bench to the bedside. Today, the [Hirshberg Laboratories at UCLA](#) closely collaborate with the [UCLA Agi Hirshberg Center for Pancreatic Diseases](#), a center of excellence for patient treatment and care.

“It is an honor to have both Johnese and Dr. Mazziotta join us

at the LA Cancer Challenge for our landmark year. Bringing together doctors and patients, families and healthcare leaders has been my dream. We are stronger when we work together and learn from each other's experiences," wrote Agi Hirshberg, Founder and President of the Hirshberg Foundation.

As we commemorate 25 years, we celebrate our progress, our determination and our partnership with UCLA. We are proud to honor Johnese Spisso and Dr. John Mazziotta as they lead the [UCLA Health](#) team at the 25th LA Cancer Challenge.

"Agi and the Hirshberg Foundation have been invaluable partners over the past 25 years. Serving as co-chair with Dr. Mazziotta is an honor and symbolizes the partnership between research and patient care that is a cornerstone of UCLA Health, and we couldn't have done it without the support of the Hirshberg Foundation. I look forward to celebrating with the pancreatic cancer community on October 23, 2022," said Johnese Spisso.

"The LACC allows our doctors to meet the families who are fundraising for a cure, lets the fundraisers cheer for the 3-, 5-, and 10-year survivors. It is a day of joy and some tears but most of all, a day of hope," said Hirshberg. **Join Agi, Johnese, Dr. Mazziotta and the pancreatic cancer community at the [25th LA Cancer Challenge](#) on October 23rd at UCLA.**

[Johnese Spisso](#) assumed the position of President of UCLA Health, CEO of UCLA Hospital System and Associate Vice Chancellor of UCLA Health Sciences in 2016. She is a nationally recognized academic healthcare leader with more than 30 years of experience, and oversees all operations of UCLA's hospitals and clinics as well as the health system's regional outreach strategy.

Before coming to UCLA, Spisso spent 22 years at UW Medicine in Seattle, Washington, where she was promoted from Chief Nursing

Officer to Chief Operating Officer to Chief Health System Officer and Vice President of Medical Affairs for the University of Washington. She served in the latter role from 2007-2016 and was responsible for the two academic medical centers, two community hospitals, the network of community clinics, and the Airlift Northwest flight program. While there, Spisso played a major role in expanding collaborations with regional hospitals and in the operational integration of two major community hospitals into UW Medicine. She also was instrumental in leading the development of a statewide trauma system.

Prior to UW, as a registered nurse, Spisso rose through the ranks over 12 years at the University of California, Davis Medical Center and directed the critical care, trauma and burn center, emergency services and the Life Flight Air-Medical Program. Before that, she began her career as a critical-care nurse in the medical, surgical and transplant intensive care unit at the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center Presbyterian.

Spisso received a master's degree in health care administration and public administration from the University of San Francisco, and a bachelor's degree in health sciences from Chapman College. She earned her RN at the St. Francis School of Nursing. She has published numerous articles and book chapters on healthcare leadership, and she serves on several national boards, including the American Association of Medical Colleges' Council of Teaching Hospitals and Health Systems.

Spisso is active in community leadership and has served as the Los Angeles Community Chair for the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society Light the Night Walk as well as the Los Angeles Community Chair for the American Heart Association's Go Red for Women Luncheon. She has received numerous awards and recognition throughout her career, recently being named to Modern

Healthcare's Top 25 Most Influential Women Leaders in 2019, LA Business Journal's 500 Most Influential Leaders in Los Angeles in 2020, Modern Healthcare's Top 50 Clinical Leaders of 2020 in the U.S., and the Los Angeles Business Journal Women of Influence Award for Health Care in 2021 and 2022.

Vice Chancellor of UCLA Health Sciences to serve as Honorary Medical Chair at the 25th LA Cancer Challenge

As the Hirshberg Foundation and the LA Cancer Challenge commemorate 25 years of advancing research and providing patient services for the pancreatic cancer community, we are grateful to partner with UCLA Health and welcome Dr. John C. Mazziotta as our Honorary Medical Chair.

When the Hirshberg Foundation was [established in July of 1997](#), it was in partnership with doctors and researchers at UCLA. The Ronald S. [Hirshberg Translational Pancreatic Cancer Research Laboratory](#) was opened shortly thereafter in February 1998. The Hirshberg research centers at UCLA have grown to include three laboratories that collaborate amongst each other and with the [UCLA Agi Hirshberg Center for Pancreatic Cancer Diseases](#). **This deep partnership with UCLA is why it is such a distinct honor to recognize Dr. John Mazziotta and have him leading the [UCLA Health](#) team at the 25th LA Cancer Challenge.**

“I look forward to marking 25 years of fighting towards a cure with my friend Dr. Mazziotta by our side. It is an honor to have him participating in the LA Cancer Challenge,” said Agi Hirshberg, Founder and President of the Hirshberg Foundation.

In reply to our invitation, Dr. Mazziotta wrote, “I have long admired and commend the work of the Hirshberg Foundation. Their partnership has helped establish UCLA as a premiere pancreatic cancer center and we are deeply grateful for their longstanding support. It is a true privilege to be the Honorary Medical Chair for this landmark year of the LA Cancer Challenge. I look forward to leading our UCLA Health team, see you there!”

“We have made such progress and I am confident that our momentum and hard work will carry us to the finish: a cure! I have happy tears just thinking about all the hugs and faces I will see at this year’s event,” said Agi Hirshberg. **Join Agi, Dr. Mazziotta and the pancreatic cancer community at the [25th LA Cancer Challenge](#) on October 23rd at UCLA.**

[Dr. John C. Mazziotta](#) has been Vice Chancellor of UCLA Health Sciences and CEO of UCLA Health since 2015. A member of the David Geffen School of Medicine faculty since 1983, Dr. Mazziotta also has served as Dean of the medical school, Associate Vice Chancellor of UCLA Health Sciences and Executive Vice Dean. In addition, he was chair of the Department of Neurology and founding director of the Ahmanson-Lovelace Brain Mapping Center.

Dr. Mazziotta earned his MD and PhD in neuroanatomy and computer science from Georgetown University. Following an internship at Georgetown, he completed neurology and nuclear medicine training at UCLA.

Dr. Mazziotta has published more than 260 research papers and eight texts. He has received numerous awards and honors,

including the Oldendorf Award from the American Society of Neuroimaging, the S. Weir Mitchell Award and the Wartenberg Prize of the American Academy of Neurology, and the Von Hevesy Prize from the International Society of Nuclear Medicine. Dr. Mazziotta has been elected to the National Academy of Medicine and the Royal College of Physicians.