

AWAARE!

SPRING 2024



"I got to meet Harold Leever. That man was a saint, a wonderful, wonderful man. I remember he would insist that you call him Harold, and once a week, he would come in with his kilt on! He did so much for the community. He left a legacy here – this Cancer Center – in Waterbury."

– Ed DiTota



Who was Harold Leever?

Mr. Harold Leever (pictured above with his wife Ruth in 1990) was a local businessman, philanthropist, and generous donor who jumpstarted the capital campaign for the Leever Center, which opened its doors in 2002 and bears his name.

We're Here for You Every Step of the Way

*One person's cancer experience
in his own words*

When patients come to The Harold Leever Regional Cancer Center, they need more than just medical treatment – they need support, resources, and guidance to help them through a challenging journey. Here, the patient is at the center of everything we do. From prevention to treatment and recovery, we're here for you every step of the way, providing the care and support you need to ease your cancer journey and ensure you receive the best care possible.

We spoke with a prior patient, Mr. Ed DiTota (left), who shared his cancer journey and spoke about his time at the Leever Center.

Ed, tell us about yourself. I'm a native of Waterbury and was a banker for almost 40 years. When I left banking, I went into my own business as a small business consultant and am now providing payroll services as well. Thirteen years ago, my wife and I relocated to Southington. Now, at age 77, I'm still going 48 hours a week and love what I'm doing.

When did your cancer journey begin? Actually, my journey began a little over three years ago. The diagnosis was prostate cancer. When you hear that word "cancer," you automatically panic. It's a kick in the gut, but thank God for people like my urologist, Dr. Anthony Kim, and the staff at the Leever Center who help you get through it. I was very fortunate because prostate cancer is one of the easiest forms of cancer to cure.

After your diagnosis, what was the next step? I remember Dr. Kim saying to me we're going to treat it and I had two choices, either surgery or radiation (therapy). Dr. Kim recommended I go with radiation. And I'll never forget what he said to me and to my wife: "Okay, you have to go for 45 treatments." I said, "Did you say four or five?" He said, "No, 45." So, every day for three months, I was here. Right after I was diagnosed, I came to the Leever Center and met with Dr. Joseph Ravalese. He and the staff were very, very supportive. Before you knew it, I got to know and love the entire staff. They became and continue to be family.

Tell us about your visits. My treatment didn't take more than 10 or 15 minutes. It took me longer to get here and home. But again, it was a pleasant experience because of

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Dr. Ravalese and the entire staff at Leever.

I remember Dr. Ravalese said to me, "You have to drink 16 ounces of water before you get here." By the time I got here, I was ready to explode. And I said to one of the girls here, "I'm going to the bathroom." Unfortunately, Dr. Ravalese was standing right behind me and he said, "No way, you're not going yet."

Describe your treatment. The first time I came in, I met the doctor. The second time, after meeting with the doctor, they made me a cast – a special mold to lie on – so I'd be in the same position every day. Each day I came, there was no pain – just a large machine going back and forth over me. It was really easy on my part.

Normally, I'm a basket case around doctors and nurses. Luckily for me there were two radiation therapists who had me laughing every time. It was one of those things where they helped relax me right away. One of them said, "We're going to make this into a game." And she did. She counted down the days... 45, 44... and she remembered every day. It was amazing. And you get through it. You have to have faith in the Man upstairs, but

you also have to have faith that you're getting the best treatment possible.

Did you use any of the other services available? The social worker? The nutritionist? The patient financial counselor? Transportation? Valet parking? Genetic counseling? I really didn't need the other services. But the staff made it a point that I talk to everyone. Where, in case there is a need, you know it's available. They also made a point to tell me that the important thing was for me to get better.

Overall, how would you describe your experience? On a scale of one to 10, I would give it a 99. I mean, everybody, from the parking valet, to the receptionist, to my dear friend Deborah, was 100% helpful and supportive.

Tell us about your life today. It's been a little over three years now since my last treatment. Dr. Ravalese tells me I'm on the five-year plan, so I can't consider myself completely cancer free. However, the day will come and I can then say I'm cancer free.

You have supported the Leever Center financially. How did that come about? I've made contributions to the Leever Center over the years, and will continue to make contributions. My thought was that we have to do something for the staff. I make my contribution on an annual basis and designate it "staff appreciation," and I will do this for as long as I can. Last year, they purchased an ice machine for the staff room. It's just a small way of saying thank you.

I've actually written to the editorial page of the newspaper and told them about my journey and encouraged others to make a contribution to the staff fund as well. Without their support it can't work. At the Leever Center, everybody's happy and cheerful and they get you through it.

What would you say to new patients coming to Leever? It could be frightening, but it's not that bad, and with the support of this wonderful team at Leever, you get through it. I talked about Waterbury before, and it's amazing how lucky Waterbury is to have this Center. I was fortunate enough to be at the dedication of this facility and other functions over the years, so I knew about the Center. Then, all of a sudden, I was a patient. So now I know both sides and it's a world-class facility with a world-class staff.



Yeo Yang Shin, MD

*Diagnostic Radiologist
Naugatuck Valley Radiology*

ASK THE DOC

What is your role in the multidisciplinary conferences held at the Leever Center?

I'm a radiologist. Radiologists are medical doctors who specialize in diagnosing diseases using medical imaging. My subspecialty is in breast imaging/imaging studies related to breast cancer – mammograms, ultrasounds, breast MRIs, as well as procedures that are image guided.

Over the past 16 years, my main contribution to the multidisciplinary conference is consulting with the breast surgeons and the radiation and medical oncologists. I also help with surgical planning and reviewing metastatic workups. In the conferences we have a comprehensive discussion about each case and come to a consensus about the best treatment moving forward.

Patients can be comforted knowing that they have an entire medical team working on their behalf.

SPOTLIGHT ON: ANN'S PLACE

The Harold Leever Regional Cancer Center is proud to partner with Ann's Place, a community-based cancer support team that offers the Art Therapy and Mindfulness Practice support groups held on-site at the Leever Center.

Ann's Place is a compassionate nonprofit serving Connecticut and New York's Hudson Valley, offering professional counseling, support groups, wellness activities, and educational resources, all at no charge. The programs offered by Ann's Place have enhanced the quality of life for thousands of people facing cancer.

"It's not really convenient for folks in the Greater Waterbury area to attend in person in Danbury. So after COVID, when we started going in person again, we teamed up with the Leever Center to offer sessions that are better off in person, such as Art Therapy and Mindfulness Practice," said Debbie Mendez, ATR-P, LPC-A, Bilingual Clinician (pictured above in an art therapy session with a patient) who runs the two support groups at Leever.

"It brings me so much joy to be able to offer just a snippet of the services that we have at Ann's Place at the Leever Center so that folks are aware that support is out there. The hope is that by participating in these group sessions, you can utilize the skills you learn when you need them — if you are having insomnia, for example, or waiting for the results of a scan."

For more information or to register, email clientservices@annsplace.org or call 203-709-6568 x109.



MINDFULNESS PRACTICE SUPPORT GROUP 2nd/4th Tuesday of the month, 1:30 - 3 pm

A meditation and discussion group to encourage self-awareness and self-compassion. This class offers breathing techniques and other mindfulness practices that are designed to assist individuals in managing stress and challenges associated with their cancer journey.

ART THERAPY CANCER SUPPORT GROUP 2nd/4th Tuesday of the month, 3:30 - 5 pm

Open to anyone on their cancer journey, this support group will utilize the art-making process, helping to bring thoughts and emotions into the conscious mind. Modalities include painting, drawing, sculpting, mixed media, and more. Art Therapy is beneficial for all ages and does not require any previous art experience.



ARTIST: MATHEW

Mathew was a 54-year-old man who came to me for individual art therapy when he was given three to four months to live. By then, his cancer had metastasized to his brain. This piece was a response to what he believed (and hoped) would be waiting for him after death.



ARTIST: SOFIA

Sofia is a 31-year-old woman who is in treatment for a rare type of bladder cancer. She is resentful when people who know about her cancer say things like "You look great!" On the inside, she feels poked and prodded, stripped of agency over her body.

We explore these feelings in art therapy. The outside of the mask is perfectly composed, bold and strong (above left). The inside of the mask is raw, vulnerable, and vein-like (above right).

HLRCC Hosts Oral, Head & Neck Cancer Screenings

Free Community Event Promoting Awareness and Early Detection

Approximately 110,000 people are diagnosed with oral, head, and neck cancer every year in the United States. If you're a frequent or heavy user of alcohol, tobacco, or tobacco products, you are considered high risk and should be screened regularly.

On April 16, the Leever Center provided free oral, head, and neck cancer screenings to the community. Leever providers and staff members volunteered their time to screen 34 individuals at high risk for these types of cancer. A follow-up appointment with their primary care physician was recommended for 16 screening participants, and four were referred for further head and neck evaluation.

1: Left to right: Deborah Parkinson and Melissa Seres, HLRCC; Amy Baldwin-Stephens, Saint Mary's Hospital/THofNE; Karen Senich, HLRCC.



2: Drs. Chris Loughlin, Anna Ziganshina, and Mahesh Bhaya.



3: Left to right: Drs. Neil Schiff and Raymond Winicki; Deborah Mastriani, APRN; Dr. Joseph Ravalese III, and Dr. Douglas Housman, HLRCC.



4: Left to right: Cherie Pritt, RN; Samantha Conway, RN; Janet Policano, RT.

An Unforgettable Evening for a Great Cause...

Are You DENSE?

MUSICFEST 2024

Leever was a proud Pink Ribbon Partner for the 15th annual Are You Dense Inc. MusicFest, an evening of fun and fundraising to prevent late-stage breast cancer. This year's event was held on April 6 at Seven Angels Theatre in Waterbury. A music festival unlike any other, the event featured a captivating performance by Eaglemania, the world's premier Eagles tribute band, as well as a raffle and silent auction. Thank you to everyone who attended!



Light The Night Walk

Bringing Light to the Darkness

We sponsored the Leukemia & Lymphoma Society's Hartford Light The Night walk this year. Over 400 walkers participated. The event raised over \$200,000 to help cure blood cancer and improve the quality of life for patients and their families.

The Great *Organic* Debate

The concept of organic farming is not new.

In fact, “traditional farming,” now called “organic,” has been practiced for thousands of years.

However, in the mid-20th century, the use of fertilizers, pesticides, and herbicides changed the course of the farming industry. Since then, the use of many pesticides has continued, and the controversy about their effects on health and the environment spawned the reemergence of “organic farming” in the 1970s.

Organic farming refers to crops and livestock that are produced without the use of pesticides, hormones, or antibiotics. Organic does NOT mean that a food is nutritionally superior. In fact, there are many “organic” candies, sweets, and ultra-processed foods, which may not contain pesticides but offer no nutritional benefit. To guarantee that a food is truly organic, look for the USDA (US Department of Agriculture) Organic Seal.

The Environmental Working Group (ewg.org) has created a list of produce that is most likely to contain higher levels of pesticides. These foods, known as the “dirty dozen,” should be consumed sparingly or, even better, purchased in their organic version. The “clean 15” foods have the lowest levels of pesticides, and the “conventional” or non-organic versions are considered safe to eat. To read more about which fruits and vegetables are on these lists, visit ewg.org/foodnews/full-list.php.

Recently *Consumer Reports* (May-June 2024) published a lengthy article, “Produce Without Pesticides.” In it was a summary of seven years of data from the USDA pesticide residue monitoring program. They noted that two thirds of these foods were ranked low or very low risk, but there were six fruits and vegetables that were conventionally (non-organically) grown that contained higher levels of pesticides and should be avoided. For these foods, buy the organic version (see below).

By Leever Nutritionist Karen Sabbath, MS, RD, CSO
(ksabbath@leevercancercenter.org or 203-575-5510)

How to minimize your exposure to pesticides:

- Eat lots of low-risk produce.
- Switch to organic for higher-risk produce, or eat these products sparingly.
- Most imported produce is comparable to domestically grown; however, you may want to avoid produce imported from Mexico.
- Wash your produce before using. No need for special vegetable washing products, soap, or bleach. Just rinse with cold water for 15-20 seconds. For produce with skins, use a brush or your hands to rub the surface. Although you may not be able to remove all pesticide residues, it will certainly help.

Organic foods are usually more expensive. If price is a significant consideration, avoid or use the foods most contaminated sparingly, and focus on the many conventional options that are safe.

When is Organic produce a better choice?



Blueberries: One in five samples of fresh and frozen conventionally grown blueberries had pesticide residues that may be harmful to children.



Bell Peppers: Close to half of all domestic, conventionally grown peppers, including hot peppers, tested positive for oxamyl, one of the higher-risk pesticides.



Potatoes: All potatoes, including organic, were contaminated with a pesticide, chlorpropham, which is sprayed on before being bagged, to prevent sprouting. The organic potatoes were likely exposed from being processed on the same machinery. Sweet potatoes posed a much lower risk.



Green Beans: Imported green beans (organic and conventional) from Mexico had very high levels of a pesticide banned by the EPA in 2011, suggesting illegal use. Domestically grown green beans and snap peas are a better choice.



Kale: Conventionally grown kale and mustard greens contained multiple pesticides, some of which have been banned since 2000.

Watermelons: Only 3% of watermelons contain pesticides, but levels were higher than considered to be safe. Cantaloupe had much lower levels.

A Community of Caring

The Harold Leever Regional Cancer Center wishes to express its appreciation to our neighbors and friends...



Thank you to **Dominic Rinaldi**, who, in partnership with **O'Rourke & Birch Florists**, created beautiful vases of flowers to give free to Leever patients in memory of his wife, **Antoinette Rinaldi**, who was a Leever patient for 15 years.

Left to right: Deborah Parkinson, HLRCC Operations Director; Dominic Rinaldi; and Melissa Seres, HLRCC social worker.

We also thank Waterbury-based **O'Rourke & Birch Florist** for their kind donation of carnations for our patients to take home.



Great thanks to **Krista Palomba** and her friends who created and filled 75 special patient bags.

Our incredibly generous **HLRCC staff** and **Brave at Heart Women's Breast Cancer Support Group** made the holidays brighter for all by contributing gift cards for our patients.

HLRCC's Dr. Douglas Housman and Sue Ascencao, Brave at Heart Women's Breast Cancer Support Group.



Our heartfelt appreciation to **Krista Palomba** and the **Judson School Student Council, Watertown** for two generous donations of patient care bags.

Our immense gratitude to:

- **The Watertown Police Department** hosted their annual golf tournament, once again teeing off for HLRCC. We are very grateful to **Officer Austin Keeney** who organized the event.
- **The American Cancer Society** for providing a transportation grant to help Leever patients get to and from appointments.
- **Pink Aid's Pink Posse** for their donation of signature pink bags of essential patient items.
- **Mary Ann Mizeski** for her generous gift of over 30 scarves.
- **Grace Lutheran Church** members for chemo caps.
- **Maryann Jackson** for chemo caps and a shawl.
- **The Busy Bees Farmingbury Women's Club, Wolcott** for comfort pillows and port protectors.
- **Ethel Grant** for beautiful handmade blankets.
- **The Knitting Group, North Congregational Church, Woodbury** for prayer shawls and blankets.
- **Pomperaug High School Interact Club** for their kind Valentine's Day cards.
- **Stop & Shop** for raising funds from the purchase of Community Bags.

aware!

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We encourage your feedback.
If there is a cancer topic you would like covered, to respond to an article you've read, or to be put on our mailing list, please call 203-575-5555 or email: dparkinson@leevercancercenter.org



**THE HAROLD LEEVER
REGIONAL CANCER CENTER**

1075 Chase Parkway, Waterbury, CT 06708
203-575-5555
leevercancercenter.org



Monthly Support Groups

NEW!

ART THERAPY CANCER SUPPORT GROUP

Second and fourth Tuesday of every month
3:30 - 5:00 PM

Location: HLRCC

See page 3 for more information.

To register, call 203-790-6568 x109 or email
clientservices@annsplace.org.

BRAVE AT HEART: WOMEN'S BREAST CANCER SUPPORT GROUP

First Wednesday of every month
7:00 - 8:00 PM

Location: Jesse Camille's, Naugatuck, CT

For more information, please email
BraveatHeart3@gmail.com or call
Sue Ascencao at 203-232-3026.

COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS

Second Thursday of every month
6:30 - 9:00 PM

Location: HLRCC Meditation Room, 1st Floor

For more information, please contact
Kathy Daisey: 203-723-5067 or Sharon Burns:
860-384-1398.

CT MULTIPLE MYELOMA FIGHTERS SUPPORT GROUP

Second Wednesday of every month
6:00 - 8:00 PM

Location: Prospect Library

For more information, please contact
Robin Tuohy: 203-206-3536.

GREATER WATERBURY AREA OSTOMY SUPPORT GROUP

First Monday of every month
6:30 - 8:30 PM

Location: HLRCC Conference Center,
Ground Floor

For more information, please contact Bob
or Deborah at the Ostomy Foundation:
475-209-2404.

HOPE MUTUAL AID GROUP FOR PATIENTS AND THEIR LOVED ONES

First and third Tuesday of every month
4:00 - 5:00 PM

Location: HLRCC Patient Resource Library

This group provides a comfortable and
confidential environment in which to share
your experiences and gain strength and
encouragement. For additional information,
contact Melissa Seres, MSW, LCSW, OSW-C:
mseres@leeevercancercenter.org or
203-575-5511.

MINDFULNESS PRACTICE SUPPORT GROUP

Second and fourth Tuesday of every month
1:30 - 3:00 PM

Location: HLRCC

See page 3 for more information.
To register, call 203-790-6568 x109 or email
clientservices@annsplace.org.



HELPFUL RESOURCES

For programs providing
support and information:
211 or 211.org

Direct numbers for specific resources:

Domestic violence
888-774-2900 English
844-831-9200 Spanish

Suicide
866-794-0021 Greater Waterbury

Child abuse
800-842-2288

Crisis hotline for young adults
Text "listen" to 741741

Elder abuse
888-385-4225

Sexual assault
888-999-5545 English
888-568-8332 Spanish

Veterans crisis hotline
800-273-8255 and press 1
Text: 838255
or veteranscrisisline.net

Alcoholics Anonymous
866-783-7712 English
or ct-aa.org

Narcotics Anonymous
800-662-4357/800-420-9064
ctna.org

**National Alliance of
Mental Health (NAMI)**
800-215-3021

Food resources
ctfoodbank.org
(Local food pantries can be
looked up by zip code)

**We are celebrating National Cancer Survivors Day
at the Greater Waterbury Relay for Life.**

**Pick up a sweet treat and capture the
memories at our photo booth!**



Saturday, June 15 • 12 - 10 pm
Holy Cross High School, 587 Oronoke Road, Waterbury