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Grateful Patient Initiates ‘Woz Challenge’ to Raise Funds for Pancreatic Cancer Research

John “Woz” Wozniak has been a regular visitor to Jefferson’s Center City campus for more than a quarter century. Through his career as a mechanical contractor, the Philadelphia native has helped design, build and maintain the hospital’s facilities and mechanical systems. Last year, he transitioned from vendor to patient when, as an otherwise healthy 55-year-old, he was diagnosed with Stage III pancreatic cancer.

Wozniak was among the 15 percent of pancreatic cancer patients who are candidates for the Mini-Whipple procedure, which he underwent at Jefferson on October 13, 2014. In recovery, Wozniak’s first thought was to ask his surgeon, Charles J. Yeo, MD, FACS, the Samuel D. Gross Professor and Chair of Surgery and Co-Director of the Jefferson Pancreas, Biliary and Related Cancer Center, what he could do to show his gratitude to Jefferson. Dr. Yeo joked, “Give me a million dollars” before explaining the dire lack of funding for pancreatic cancer research.

That jovial suggestion led to the “Woz Challenge” – a grassroots, patient-driven campaign. As soon as he was back on his feet, Wozniak reached out to his circle of family, friends, colleagues and fellow alumni of La Salle College High School, where his 16-year-old son currently studies. His loved ones rallied around him, helping produce a video about his experiences and spread the word about the need for more funding.

Since kicking off the Woz Challenge, Wozniak has helped raise $46,100 – and counting – for the cause. And he has no plans to stop anytime soon. He says he remains grateful for the gift of life and for the support and prayers he’s received over the past year.

When he isn’t receiving follow-up care, he devotes each day to going to church, exercising to stay fit, and spending as much time as he can with his son, mother and other family and friends. He’s also committed to being an outgoing – and outspoken – advocate for pancreatic cancer research: “Every time I go somewhere, I talk about this and send people the video,” he says. “I never thought I would do something like this, but I think this is my calling.”

To contribute to the Woz Challenge in support of pancreatic cancer research, please visit advancement.jefferson.edu/Wozniak or contact Lara Goldstein, MBA, in the Office of Institutional Advancement at 215-955-8797 or lara.goldstein@jefferson.edu.