Staying in Gear: 10 Years of Raising Funds, Awareness for Colorectal Cancer

When it comes to planning and managing events, Maria Grasso is truly a pro. As a Senior Director of National Accounts with the Philadelphia Convention & Visitors Bureau, she has executed numerous events, including the 2017 NFL Draft, with aplomb. Outside work, she applies those skills as Executive Director of Get Your Rear in Gear Philadelphia (GYRIG). For Grasso – who lost both her father and grandfather to colorectal cancer – the project is deeply personal.

After learning of the first Colon Cancer Coalition’s GYRIG event in 2005, Grasso was motivated to bring the effort to Philadelphia. She organized the first GYRIG event in 2009 and continues to raise funds to support research, education and screening for colorectal cancers in the Philadelphia region.

On March 24, Grasso, her husband, Sam, and a team of 200+ volunteers hosted the 10th GYRIG Philadelphia event. More than 3,000 participants joined in for the four-mile run, two-mile remembrance walk and Kids’ Fun Run – along with a giant inflatable colon that uses humor to encourage people to learn about colon cancer facts, symptoms and questions to ask healthcare providers.

This year’s GYRIG event brought the total funds raised in the decade to more than $2.2 million – with all monies raised staying in the tristate area. Jefferson’s Departments of Surgery and Medical Oncology at the Sidney Kimmel Cancer Center are among the beneficiaries – including ongoing research by Scott D. Goldstein, MD, FACS, Director, Division of Colorectal Surgery, and Edith P. Mitchell, MD, FACP, Program Leader, Gastrointestinal Oncology.

Most recently, the GYRIG grant funded a colonoscopy coordinator to support patients in the Division of Gastroenterology & Hepatology.

Last year, Jefferson nominated Grasso for an award from the Association of Fundraising Professionals. On November 17, 2017, she was honored with the President’s Award at the National Philanthropy Day Awards Gala Breakfast. It was a well-deserved recognition of Grasso’s boundless energy and dedication to the cause.

To learn more about supporting colorectal cancer research and programs at Jefferson, please contact Kelly Austin in the Office of Institutional Advancement at 215-955-6383 or Kelly.Austin@jefferson.edu.