



## DONATING A CURE

### How Minnesotans benefit from money raised by Komen for the Cure. | BY ALLISON CAMPBELL JENSEN

It takes teams of people—researchers, physicians, and breast cancer survivors—working all year long to fight breast cancer and improve the lives of women affected by the disease. And it takes money.

In 2010\*, the Minnesota Affiliate of Susan G. Komen for the Cure awarded \$1.8 million in grants to 20 programs that promote breast health and breast cancer awareness *right here* in Minnesota.

The money went to statewide breast cancer screening, education, and treatment programs for medically underserved Minnesota women. Last year, the local affiliate also awarded close to \$510,000 to the national grants program.

Here's how some Minnesotans are using the grant money to help others.

#### Funding Research

One of Dr. Douglas Yee's responsibilities is to ensure that the funds raised go toward research projects to advance breast cancer treatments. He serves on both Komen for the Cure's national scientific advisory council and the Minnesota Affiliate of Susan G. Komen for the Cure Board of Directors. He also heads the Masonic Cancer Center at the University of Minnesota, treating breast cancer patients and carrying out research on the molecular pathways that contribute to breast cancer—work that is partly funded by a Komen stipend.

On the national scene, Komen grants help support three promising avenues. First, young investigators receive money to launch their first research programs. Secondly, researchers propose projects

that promise to break new territory in breast cancer research. Promise grants comprise the third avenue. "[They] are fairly large amounts of money to try to put together a team of investigators to address a critical problem with a clinical trial that will result in the most impact," Yee says.

In recent years, Komen-funded research has focused on improving early detection with better imaging and better understanding of genetics,

**In 2010, 20 breast cancer programs in Minnesota received \$1.8 million in grants.**

as well as investigating the migration of cancer cells within the body—metastasis—and preventing it. Team science is key. "Molecular biologists working with the clinicians, biostatisticians, informatics people, and other scientists—that's how we are going to move the bar," Yee says.

The researchers also depend on the participation of patients. Any patients with breast cancer or at risk for breast cancer have a role to perform in volunteering for studies that will advance science and ensure state-of-the-art care. "I always try to impress on people—on women in particular—this is team science, this is a team approach, and that team also involves patients at risk for the disease or with the disease," Yee says.

Previous patients' willingness to volunteer for clinical trials contributed to today's treatments. With help from

## A Family That Races

Leslie Gottlieb, a 44-year-old Minnetonka mother of four, was diagnosed with breast cancer in March 2003. Ten years earlier, she had helped Char Plitman (who brought the event to the Twin Cities) by volunteering for the inaugural race in 1993.

In dealing with the diagnosis, "my husband, the kids, and I just kept going forward with our lives," says Gottlieb, noting that she scheduled her double mastectomy for after her family's spring break trip. "We tried to keep things as normal as possible."

What's more, Gottlieb wanted to be sure that her kids—Isaac, 10; Rachael, 15; Marlee, 17; and Nate, 18—weren't afraid of breast cancer. To that end, her four children began participating several years ago in the Kids



PHOTO BY CRAIG BARES

#### LESLIE GOTTLIEB

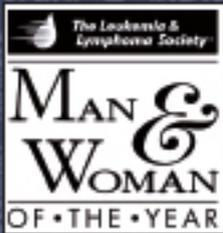
→ Leslie's husband and four children show their support by volunteering and participating in various Race for the Cure events.

for the Cure Fun Run, which takes place the day before the big race. In 2010, the kids took part in the full Race for the Cure for the first time with their parents and plan to do so again this year.

In Race for the Cure, Gottlieb finds comfort for her children's future. Funds raised by the race "have contributed so much to breast cancer research," she says, "and it gives me reassurance that things will be different for my daughters and my sons."

The Gottlieb children have become ambassadors and volunteers for the cause. "I feel like I have a more personal connection [to the race] because my mom had breast cancer," says Marlee. "It's a good cause and fun for me to do." —H.O.

\*Since 1993, the Minnesota Affiliate has awarded approximately \$32 million to Minnesota non-profit institutions promoting breast health.



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Questions? Contact Cathy Swanson Girsch at [Cathy.SwansonGirsch@LLS.org](mailto:Cathy.SwansonGirsch@LLS.org) or (763) 852-3814.

## Race for the Cure

women, more can be accomplished: "What is today's ceiling is tomorrow's floor," Yee says.

Progress has been made during the last two decades, and Yee believes Komen deserves some of the credit. He supports Komen for the Cure because it "educates women, has resources available for local projects, and provides funding for high-quality nationally competitive research," Yee says. "What they have done and what they are continuing to do is extraordinarily important for us if we're going to cure this disease."

## Smart Screening

While research is important, so is screening. The state-run **Sage Screening Program** reaches uninsured and underinsured women, particularly in underserved populations. Since its founding in 1991, Sage has provided screenings for breast and cervical cancers to more than 130,000 women. According to Dr. Jonathan Slater, Sage's first program director and chief of Cancer Control at the Minnesota Department of Health, more than 1,700 breast cancers have been diagnosed. The program receives annual grants of approximately \$500,000 from Komen's Minnesota Affiliate.

Reaching women even with free services can be challenging. For instance, one farmer, after noticing a lump in her breast, did not go to the clinic immediately. Slater believes it was because she and her husband are the only ones who work the farm. "If she were down, the farm would go down," Slater says. Then she heard about Sage, which pays for the treatment of uninsured patients.

To help reach women, Sage uses direct mail, offers incentives for calling its toll-free number, and pursues specific groups by such routes as Spanish-language cable TV.

To overcome barriers, Sage offers translation in nearly 20 languages, employs patient navigators who connect women with one of the more than 400 screening sites in Minnesota, and has a partnership with the Mdewakanton Sioux to bring mobile mammography services to Native American women on reservations. Sage also serves homeless and other

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## Race for the Cure

populations with special needs.

"We don't let women fall through the cracks," Slater says. "If they don't qualify [for Sage]," says call center staffer Manjusha Pillai, "we give them other options."

The Komen funding is vital to Sage clients. "It's life support," Slater says. In testament to the program's benefits, he keeps a fat notebook of letters from grateful patients in his office. (See sidebar on page 93 to read one patient's story.)

## Women Helping Women

A breast cancer survivor moved to help others, Michelle Morey founded the **Pay It Forward Fund for Breast and Women's Cancer** with the help of the North Memorial Foundation. During her year and a half of breast cancer treatments, Morey, a businesswoman, was able to take three months off work—but she wondered how other women managed similar financial pressures. Morey, and her husband, Scott Bissen, wanted to help.

They began in February 2006 with a casino-themed fundraiser that brought in \$30,000. Among one of the first breast cancer patients who directly benefited from their efforts was a mother who was behind on her bills and was going to have her water turned off—which meant her children would be taken away from her.

The Pay It Forward Fund attracts support, partly because people like the direct, immediate impact: 100 percent of the money raised goes to patients to pay bills. Pay It Forward receives funding from individual donations and Komen for the Cure, which has granted \$100,000 each year for the past three years.

Every woman newly diagnosed at cancer centers located at North Memorial, Unity, and Mercy hospitals and New River Medical Center is told about the fund. "What's amazing to me," Morey says, "is how many people turn it down." She believes it's not easy for people to ask for help initially—not until their finances are really stretched. Those who receive funds are assured that they can pay it forward at a time and in a way that works for them. "That makes it easier to accept the help they need," she says.

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## Race for the Cure

Morey and Bissen remain involved with the fund. “We need to find a cure—and we need to find a way to help patients get through it,” Morey says.

### Genetic Assessment

Improving a system to identify women whose family history may put them at risk for breast cancer is the goal of the **Cancer Genetics Program at North Memorial's Humphrey Cancer Center**. Each year for the last four years, the program has received \$100,000 from Komen for the Cure to advance and improve the genetic assessment program, according to genetic counselor Joy Larsen Haidle.

This improvement has been a several-step process. The team first used the funds to develop a sophisticated triage method to better identify patients at risk. Then they adopted a digital pen that electronically records family history as patients fill out forms. This year's goal is to connect the genetic information with the electronic medical record. “It's been a big project to tackle,” Larsen Haidle says.

Along the way, the team found that about 30 percent of patients would benefit from genetic assessment. This is not genetic testing but rather the building of an extended family history. When the team can more easily figure out who might be at risk, they can more appropriately treat or even prevent breast cancer. “The power of getting this genetic information right is so important,” says oncologist Dr. Thomas Amatruda III.

Integrating this genetic information into the electronic medical record will make the sharing of information more timely and more efficient. This will help the genetic counselors, physicians, nurses, and, most importantly, the patients. The link to the medical record could never have been done without Komen's support. “We're grateful to Komen,” says Larsen Haidle.

All these teams are making progress with the support of Komen and others, yet they still have a long way to reach the ultimate goal. “Unless we cure everyone with breast cancer,” Yee says, “we know we're not good enough.” ■



## A Dove Story

Among the grateful patients of the Sage Screening Program is breast-cancer survivor Cathy Gillman.

Gillman reconnected with her high-school sweetheart, artist Ernest Gillman, after 20 years apart. They married and three years later, after having been denied health insurance, she discovered a lump. Staff at Allina Medical Clinic in Cottage Grove told her about Sage, which paid for her screening and surgery. While being driven home from the hospital after surgery, she saw a dove—but no ordinary dove.

“The dove circled the car and came over to my window,” she remembers, “hovering there before flying away.” Recognizing the car was traveling at freeway speeds yet feeling groggy from medication, she wasn’t sure this bird was real. Later she asked her husband—and he assured her the dove had appeared. The dove became Cathy’s symbol of strength.

She offers a poster of the story, illustrated by Ernest, along with prints from his original artwork to raise funds for the Sage program and for breast cancer research. She will walk May 8 at the Mall of America as a representative of Sage. —A.C.J.

*The 18" x 24" dove print by Ernest Gillman can be purchased by calling 651-330-5090. The cost is \$20 plus \$3 shipping.*

To learn more about the Sage Screening Program, call 888-643-2584.

For more information on Pay It Forward, call 763-520-1949, or link to [payitforwardfund.net](http://payitforwardfund.net).

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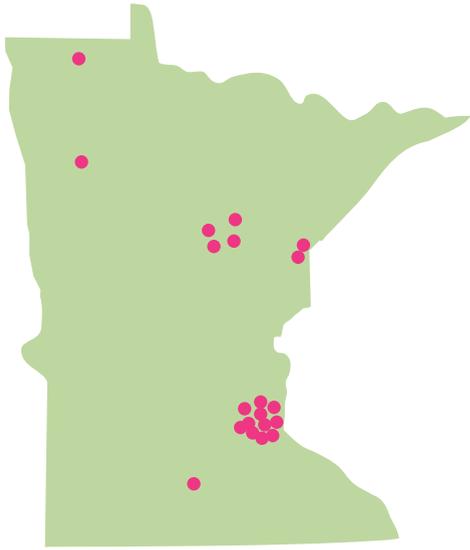
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# Grants Across Minnesota

Local communities benefit from Race for the Cure's efforts. Here's a snapshot of last year's grant recipients.



**Fact:** The Sage Screening Program offers statewide access and has clinic partners in all but one of Minnesota's 87 counties.

1. Angel Foundation, Minneapolis
2. Cuyuna Regional Medical Center, Crosby
3. ECHO Minnesota (Emergency, Community, and Health Outreach), St. Paul
4. Hastings Breast Cancer Support Group, Hastings
5. Hennepin Country Medical Center, Minneapolis
6. Humphrey Cancer Center, Robbinsdale
7. LifeCare Medical Center, Roseau
8. Mahnom Health Center, Mahnom
9. North Memorial Foundation, Robbinsdale
10. NorthPoint Health & Wellness Center, Minneapolis
11. Open Arms of Minnesota, Minneapolis
12. Riverwood Healthcare Center, Aitkin
13. South Central College—Deaf Community Health Worker Project, Mankato
14. Southside Community Health Services, Minneapolis
15. St. Joseph's Foundation, East Gull Lake
16. St. Joseph's Medical Center, Brainerd
17. Vietnamese Social Services of Minnesota, St. Paul
18. Young Survival Coalition, Duluth
19. YWCA of Duluth, Duluth
20. Minnesota Department of Health, Sage Screening Program, statewide

For more info on the grant recipients, visit [komenminnesota.org](http://komenminnesota.org) or call 952-746-1760.