

Papanicolaou Corps Long Active in Funding Cancer Research

by John Fries

Raising funds to establish or benefit programs and services in the hospital environment takes on many forms. Foundations and auxiliaries work year-round to plan and present all types of activities. Committees formed to develop and execute events meet for months in advance of the next banquet or golf outing. All do great work to ensure that members of the community have access to the best, most modern medical amenities.

And then, there is the Papanicolaou Corps, known across South Florida as the Pap Corps.

Since 1952, this all-volunteer organization has practically been in a class by itself, working tirelessly to support cancer research at the University of Miami Sylvester Comprehensive Cancer Center. The Pap Corps is named for Dr. George Papanicolaou, a Greek-born physician and researcher who lived and worked briefly in Florida before his death in 1962, and whose impressive legacy includes the introduction of the Pap smear.

Today, the Pap Corps' membership includes more than 15,000 men and women across Dade, Broward and Palm Beach counties. That number continues to grow as volunteering-minded people discover the Pap Corps.

Through a wide, diverse and creative range of fundraising activities—including luncheons, fashion shows, cruises, spa and weekend excursions, walkathons, golf and tennis tournaments and more--the Pap Corps raises more dollars for research than any other organization in the U.S., with 98 percent of it directly underwriting cancer research. To date, more than 30 million dollars has been raised to support ongoing research in areas including breast cancer, ovarian cancer, prostate cancer, lung cancer, immunotherapy, gene therapy, and drugs and drug combinations used to treat aggressive, inoperable cancers and the side effects of chemotherapy. And that's just the beginning.



Gloria Berkowitz is in her third term as president of the Pap Corps. A dynamic and dedicated woman whose roots are in Brooklyn, N.Y. by way of Long Island, Berkowitz relocated in 1989 to Boca Raton with her husband, a retired pharmacist. Active in various fundraising activities for nearly 40 years, she first learned of the Pap Corps through a friend. For the past eight years, she's worked tirelessly – initially, as a Corps member, and now, as its leader, to support cancer research.

"We've pledged to raise 10 million dollars over the next five years," said Berkowitz. "So far, we've raised over four million, and more is on the way." Like many Pap Corps members, she views her work as her mission.

"I'm passionate about this," she said.

She noted that, as new communities spring up in South Florida, the Pap Corps continues to grow. In 2004 so far, eight new chapters, or units, as they're known, have opened in the tri-county area, bringing the current number of units to more than 45. Because of the size of the Corps, the organization believes that smaller local groups can more effectively carry on different activities and make contacts more personal. As new units open, offices of the Corps and their committee members provide workshops and seminars to get them started.

The University of Miami Sylvester Comprehensive Cancer Center, South Florida's only academic medical center, was founded in 1992 and today serves as the hub for cancer-related research, diagnosis and treatment at the University of Miami School of Medicine. The center handles more than 1,100 annual inpatient admissions, performs more than 2,800 surgical procedures, and treats more than 2,900 newly diagnosed cancer patients. All physicians at the center serve as faculty members at the School of Medicine.

W. Jarrard Goodwin, M.D., F.A.C.S., who has served as the center's director since 1996, speaks enthusiastically of the Pap Corps. "No group works harder than the Pap Corps to support our research efforts," he said. "They inspire all of us to do our very best each and every day, and are quite simply the number one cancer fund-raising volunteer group anywhere!"



He mentioned examples of just a few of the research initiatives that have been funded by the Pap Corps. Each is more impressive than the next.

"We've developed a lung cancer vaccine that was tested on patients with advanced cancer and is showing promise. Now, we're on the second generation of the vaccine. We've also developed a chemical compound called 2DG that sensitizes anoxic tumor cells not killed by therapies. And, we're researching new gene therapy and immunotherapy for breast cancer," he said. "All of this--and more--is funded by the Pap Corps."

As the Pap Corps continues to grow, and researchers continue to seek answers and solutions, Berkowitz anticipates continued good news. "I believe that the cure for cancer will eventually come from the research that is being done in the laboratories," she said.