

Alumni Association News

CANCER SURVIVOR EYES NEW CAREER WITH HELP FROM WESLEYAN



Michael Edmond Donnelly '73, chair of the Wesleyan Alumni Club of Worcester, Mass., is a cancer survivor. Six years ago he was diagnosed with stage-three testicular cancer. He has some ideas about what helped him beat this

illness—and with the help of Wesleyan's Career Resource Center, he hopes to change careers and work to improve the U.S. health-care system.

His illness first became apparent after Christmas of 1997, when his wife, Mary Frances, and his children gave him not only updated rock-climbing equipment ("new perlon ropes, not the old kink-ridden ones of the 1960s"), but also a technical rock-climbing course, to begin that spring.

Donnelly, an attorney and professor who never would enter a courtroom or classroom

without preparation, started an exercise regime to redevelop stamina. His back started to ache. "A pulled muscle," he thought and shrugged it off.

Later an MRI revealed a tumor on his psine in a difficult location, pressing on nerves. A neurologist shrunk the tumor with radiation, which most likely saved him from becoming paralyzed.

Mary Frances acted as his advocate through a complicated medical regimen, taking notes, asking questions, and maintaining a presence, which was, he says, "not lost on the medical staff." When several weeks later, doctors again began discussing the possibility of sending him home—without a clear diagnosis—Mary Frances and he called all his healthcare providers to discuss his case in a businesslike meeting. He marvels, now, at the thought of anyone wending through the healthcare system without a strong personal advocate.

When the diagnosis came, it was stunning: stage-three testicular cancer, with spinal tumor as secondary site. Prognosis was poor.

Treatment included surgery, radiation,

and chemotherapy. He has recovered, though not without setbacks such as steroid psychosis that produced paranoia and a frightening sense of helplessness.

"When you have cancer," Donnelly says, "the first great concern you have is for more time." More than mere time, Donnelly wanted purposeful time; he wanted to be useful.

Increasingly troubled by the thought of so many in our country without access to healthcare, he began to consider how he might use his education and experience to level the playing field. The Kennedy School of Government offers a one-year program for mid-career professionals leading to a master's in public administration. With this degree, he could work in healthcare policy, affecting change on a national scale.

While excited about this possibility, the reality was two children in college. If he were to go back to school, Mary Frances would be the family's sole wage-earner. As a Wesleyan alumnus with lifelong access to career counseling services, Donnelly took this situation to the Career Resource Center, for a discussion with Director Michael Sciola.

Sciola recalls their work: "We brain-

stormed options; I recommended Mike do some self-assessments of his tangible and intangible assets. I played the part of the objective observer, providing the structure for him to do the work he needed to move forward. He was surprised when he discovered his assets allowed him to make a change and move from his established position."

"Mike Sciola reassured me and made me aware of the network of people working where I want to—in cancer policy, affecting issues of access," recalls Donnelly. "Ten million Americans are cancer survivors, but many people don't have healthcare. I want to focus on improving medical services and access."

Despite all the havoc and soul-searching that comes about in times of crisis, Donnelly downplays the drama of renewal. "In some ways, things didn't change," he says. "It's not that I'm a kinder, nicer person, but I want to put some value into my time. I'm looking ahead to the next 25 years."

The full autobiographical essay of his journey will be published in Illness in the Academy: A Collection of Pathobiographies by Academics, edited by Prof. Kimberly R. Mayers

SONS & DAUGHTERS PROGRAM: Preparing for the College Admission Process Sunday and Monday, November 20 & 21, 2005



A joint venture between the Office of University Relations and the Office of Admission, this program helps prepare high school students and their parents for the college admission process.

For more details and registration information, please visit

www.wesleyan.edu/sonsanddaughters.

Please note that this popular program is designed for students who are juniors in high school, and space is limited.

If you have questions about the program, please contact Linda Kavan, associate director of events, at 860/685-2641 or email: lkavan@wesleyan.edu; or Camille Dolansky, assistant director of parent programs, at 860/685-3756, or email: cdolansky@wesleyan.edu.

MARK YOUR CALENDAR

Homecoming/Family Weekend November 4–6, 2005



Would you want to miss a gathering with 2,000+ of the most interesting people in the world?
We didn't think so!

www.wesleyan.edu/hcfw

News

Alumni Association

THE TRADITION OF CHANGE

Tradition is one of the ties that bind alumni to Wesleyan. Although our bi-centennial is not that many years away, a visitor from almost any class year would be comfortable walking past College Row, across the football field and up Foss Hill to the Van Vleck observatory. Most important, that same visitor would find that the tradition of serious research, excellent teaching, committed students and stimulating intellectual, and sometimes not so intellectual, dialogue is still as much a part of Wesleyan as the ivy-covered walls of song and fact.

Ironically, another key tradition is change: Change to accommodate the evolving educational needs of the institution, to reflect student commitment to integration of mind and body through sport, to enhance the op-

portunity for the entire community to come together to exchange ideas, to socialize, to have fun. Although remaining true to the core values of the institution, each generation is challenged to re-invent Wesleyan to ensure that its traditions continue, and are relevant, to the world in which they live. Some changes are evolutionary; others represent a more dramatic realignment of resources.

A lot of change has been happening recently, and a lot more will be happening over the next few years, supported by the most successful fundraising effort by alumni and friends in the history of the college. Already Clark Hall has been completely renovated to 21st-century standards, the recent addition to the Freeman Athletic Center gives Wesleyan one of the best facilities of its kind among our peers nationally, and the terrific upgrading of Memorial Chapel and the Patricelli

'92 Theater, integrated by the dramatic Zelnick Pavilion, ensures their value to the community for decades to come. Beloved Downey House has been restored and the new Center for Film Studies is outstanding (see previous issue of *Wesleyan*). Next will be the complete rebuilding of the gym to accommodate the Usdan University Center, a much-needed renovation of the aging Hall-Atwater science facility, and the new dormitories that are approaching completion on the site of Fauver Field behind Foss Hill.

Wesleyan is a work in progress, always has been and, we sincerely hope, always will be. Only by changing can it remain the same, a place that Victor Butterfield, Wesleyan's president in that era of change following World War II, said produces "leaders in proportion to its size."

Wesleyan's commitment to its alumni is to change with the times while remaining



true to our timeless values. With your continued support as volunteers, donors, and ambassadors, we will be able to carry out that commitment.

Mark Edmiston '65, Chair,
Wesleyan Alumni Association

HELP US WELCOME THE CLASS OF 2009 TO THE WESLEYAN COMMUNITY

Summer Send-Offs will take place between mid-July and mid-August 2005 in the following areas:

Boston
Chicago
Colorado
Dallas
Houston
Long Island
Los Angeles
Maine
New Jersey
New York City
Philadelphia
San Francisco
Seattle
Washington, D.C.
Westchester County, N.Y.

For more information, go to www.wesleyan.edu/alumni/summersendoffs or contact Jennifer Jurgan, senior associate director of Alumni Relations at 860/685-2997 or jjurgan@wesleyan.edu

SNOWSHOE CLIMB UP MT. RAINIER NOT FOR TIMID

Five hardy alumni (l. to r.: Will Miceli '97, Kristin Kyrka '04, Meghan Kelly '03, Nick Waltner '86, and Eric Gale '90) turned out for the Wesleyan Club of Seattle snowshoeing/hiking/ski-touring event in Mt. Rainier National Park in April. Club Chair Nick Waltner '86 reports they hiked to an elevation of 7,000 feet, following a

trail "in between hard core and mellow" that he chose for the group. Nevertheless, unexpected excitement ensued: "Wes cross-country and track star Kristin Kyrka '04 had a little slip on her snowshoes just below Panorama Point. She slid about 20 to 30 feet onto the snow and when this happens to one the first time, it's quite scary, but Will Miceli '97 and some other hikers helped her get up on the rise. She quickly recovered, and by the end of the day she felt quite comfortable sliding down the

mountain with her snowshoes." Waltner hopes to get a Mt. Si event organized for early summer ("which eliminates the need to deal with snowshoes") and which he hopes will, like this Rainier event, "pull together a diverse group of folks."

For more information, go to www.wesleyan.edu/alumni/clubs or contact Jennifer Jurgan, senior associate director of Alumni and Parent Relations, at jjurgan@wesleyan.edu or 860/685-2997, with any questions and event ideas you have.

