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Hospital

Spotlight



Because of you...

Cancer won't slow Subha down

Generous donors, *just like you*, funded the research that saved her life

SUBHA IS SO UPBEAT, POSITIVE, AND STRONG that it's almost impossible to believe she's had two different cancer diagnoses in less than 3 years. Despite debilitating symptoms, surgery, and ongoing treatments, Subha just doesn't slow down.

Case in point: Just a few months after surgery and drug treatment for her first cancer, she was winning championships in six different sports leagues, racing in dragon boat competitions, running a large IT department at a major insurance company, and parenting two boys, along with her husband, Swaraj.

Two years later — and barely one year after her second cancer diagnosis — Subha crushed the Closer to Free Ride, cycling 40 miles to raise funds for cancer research and patient care.

Conquering one cancer...

In 2018, Subha's life seemed almost perfect. At age 35, she had a devoted husband, two wonderful sons, and a demanding and fulfilling career. She felt lucky to live in a close in Glastonbury community with neighbors who were almost like family.

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Having her life derailed by cancer was the last thing Subha expected.

She dealt with her papillary thyroid cancer with her usual positive, can-do attitude. “I did my research and found this type of cancer is very curable,” she says. “I made up my mind I would manifest myself out of this.”

Subha had surgery to remove her thyroid. This was followed by a radioactive iodine therapy so powerful that she had to remain isolated for a week to prevent exposure to her family. But it wasn’t long before she resumed her pre-cancer, very active life, and eventually her doctors declared her cancer-free.

...and living with another

Then, just a couple of years later, Subha began feeling weak and fatigued. She’ll never know for sure if it was connected to the thyroid cancer, but in 2021, she received a second cancer diagnosis — chronic myeloid leukemia.

Maintaining an upbeat attitude was tougher this time. Subha’s brother-in-law had recently passed away from leukemia. “To lose a family member, so fresh on my mind, and then to hear I have leukemia — it just shook me,” Subha recalls.

Thanks to an advanced drug treatment, Subha’s leukemia is now in remission. But there are side effects, including fatigue, digestive issues, and cough. Last year, Subha was feeling so weak, she had to take a disability leave from work.

Her dear friend, neighbor, and Smilow Hospital oncologist, Jaykumar Thumar, MD, was concerned. “He told me that I must not let that feeling sink in, that I needed to get up and work out,” Subha says.



Subha and her teammates, buzzing with energy and excitement, as they prepare to begin the Closer to Free Ride on September 9, 2023.

Closer to cancer-free, thanks to you

Dr. Thumar suggested the Closer to Free Ride. Subha’s neighbors and friends rallied to join and her team, Subha’s Minions, was born in 2022. Dr. Thumar is the team’s captain and one of Subha’s biggest cheerleaders. Last year, Subha’s Minions completed its second ride. Subha rode 65 Miles!

“It all started from Jay wanting to ensure that his very good friend and patient — me! — got the exercise I needed,” says Subha. “Now everyone is out there for me, saying, ‘Subha, you got this!’”

You can count on seeing Subha riding again next September, in the 2024 Closer to Free Ride. “I love the exercise and camaraderie, but for me, it’s more about the fundraising,” she says.

“Twenty years ago,” Subha adds, “this diagnosis came with a five-year life expectancy. Today, there is a targeted cell drug therapy that allows you to live with this disease. I’m well aware that someone paid for this research. Closer to Free is my way of paying it forward for **a future that’s cancer-free.**” ♥

✓ **YES!** I want to help more people like Subha get **CLOSER TO CANCER-FREE!**

Visit givetoynhh.org/CTF24 to make a gift to the Closer to Free Fund for cancer care and research.

Or scan this code now: 



CREATIVE GIVING



Officer Heidi supervising her team, the Sharks from Sacred Heart Academy: Chara, Tessa, Luna, Aubrey at the kids' tent, where they cared for and entertained Closer to Free kids with face-painting, balloon animals, and canine snuggles.

High school students discover the joy of giving

Sacred Heart Academy SHARKS bring us Closer to Free

JENN RACCIO, Director of Student Experience and Engagement at Sacred Heart Academy in Hamden, was profoundly affected by her first Closer to Free Ride in 2018.

“The sense of love, community, and pride when I finished was unlike anything else,” she says.

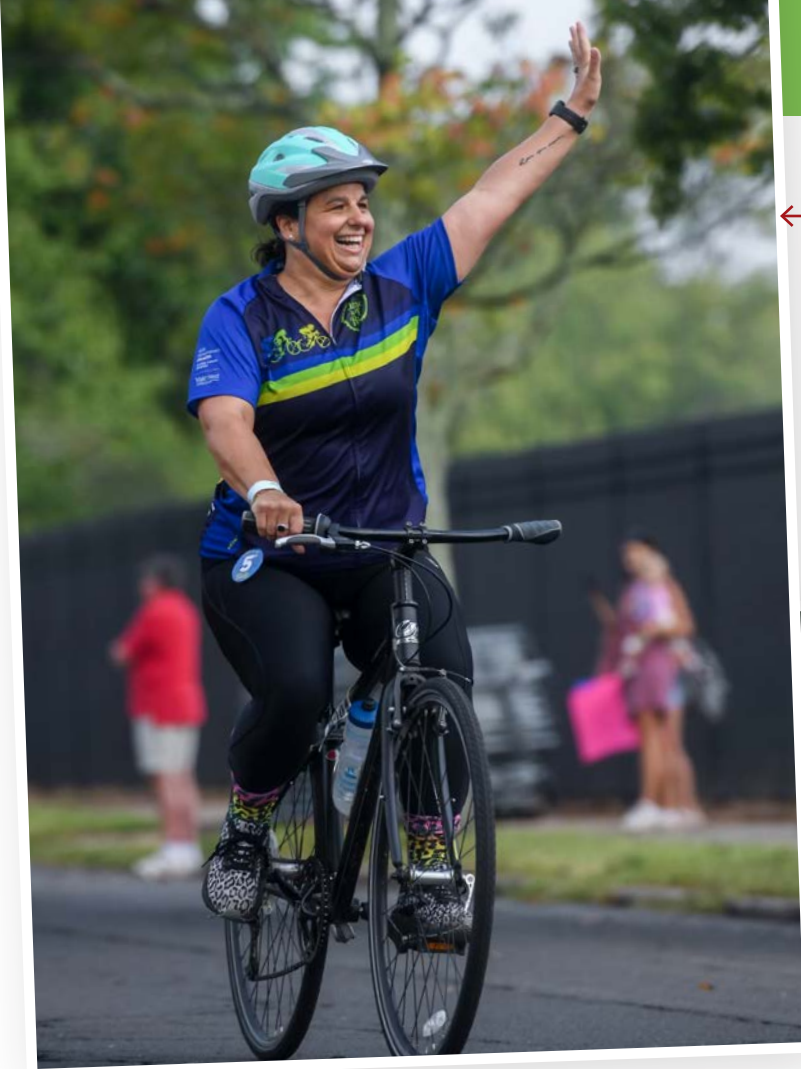
Jenn wanted that feeling for her “girls,” the high school students at Sacred Heart Academy (SHA). “We try to ingrain the value of community service into the kids’ DNA so it becomes a lifelong commitment and joy for them,” Jenn says. “The Closer to Free Ride was a way to double down — to show them how important community service is and give them an unforgettable experience.”

Last April, Jenn introduced the students to the idea, and created an official SHA Closer to Free Team, “The Sharks” (named for the school mascot). So many students tried to sign up that she had to turn some away (next year, she hopes to be able to field a bigger team). On Ride day, there were nearly sixty students, faculty, and staff arriving for duty as riders or volunteers.

Some of the girls handed out snacks and drinks to thirsty riders at a rest stop in Wallingford, while the rest worked at the Yale Bowl — the starting and end point for the Ride — monitoring traffic and safety, caring for little ones at the kids’ tent, and cheering riders on at the finish line. And some of the girls pedaled their way along the route, joining survivors and their cycling teams.

Jenn knew the girls would be swept up in the enthusiasm and celebratory spirit of the Ride, but she wanted to be sure they appreciated the seriousness of the cause as well. “I told them to look specifically for the people with survivor jerseys,” she

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← **Jenn Raccio**, Director of Student Experience and Engagement at Sacred Heart of Academy, riding in her 5th CTF Ride. Last year, she organized a team of students to ride and volunteer in the event. “We are so lucky to have this hospital nearby — the advanced technology and treatments, the amazing staff,” she says. “But they still need more. Until we have that cure, our work will never be done.”



says, “because those are the men and women they would be there for.”

Jenn wasn’t with the student volunteers during the Ride — she was out there on her bicycle on the 25-mile route — so she couldn’t wait to hear their reactions when it was over.

“When they came back to school on Monday, they were so positive and excited,” Jenn says. “In fact, the seniors were already asking if they could come back from college next year to volunteer again!”

Thank you, SHA students and faculty, for helping to move our world CLOSER TO FREE!



SAVE THE DATE! It’s not too early to start planning for Closer to Free 2024

Join Subha and her team on September 7, 2024.

100% of the funds you raise will go directly to cancer research and patient care.

Visit rideclosertofree.org for updates and information about the **MARCH 2024, CLOSER TO FREE LAUNCH PARTY**. *You’ll also find great tips for year-round training!*