

THE SECOND ANNUAL

# Day of Hope

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SANTA MARIA TIMES

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## Nurse navigators

### HELP SORT THROUGH HEALTHCARE MAZE



Daniel Dreifuss photos, Staff

**Marian Cancer Care nurse navigator** and a breast cancer specialist Liz Elliott serves as an advocate for those battling cancer by guiding patients through every step of the complex health care system, providing access to invaluable resources, and ensuring that no patient has to face cancer alone.

*When times are tough, they're by your side*

**Jennifer Best**

JBEST@BESTFAMILYADVENTURES.COM

**W**hen cancer patients are fighting for their lives, it can be both extremely challenging and overwhelming to navigate through the health care system.

Marian Cancer Care nurse navigators Liz Elliott and Sean Hunt at Mission Hope Cancer Center are there to help, to advocate, to ensure no patient ever has to face cancer alone.

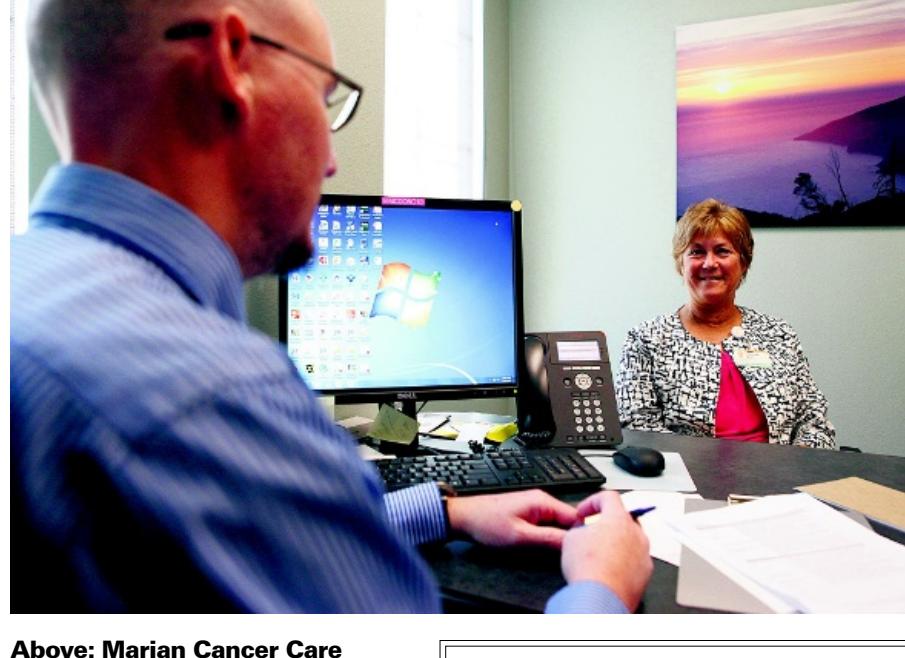
#### Breast cancer

Elliott works with every breast cancer patient that passes through Dr. Monica Rocco's office.

"I'm here to answer questions, keep track of where people are in their treatments, figure out when they're coming back to see the doctor. There's a lot of behind the scenes things I do just to keep people flowing in a good way. I don't want anyone to have to wait for treatment," Elliott said.

Both spend long hours at their desks answering phone calls, meeting with patients, tracking their progress, and helping loved ones find needed support. A sign in Elliott's office reminds her and her patients: "Your biggest

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**Above: Marian Cancer Care nurse navigator** Sean Hunt, left, speaks with Jennifer Davis, Oncology Counselor and Patient Advocate. Hunt serves as an advocate for those battling cancer by guiding patients through every step of the complex health care system.

#### Get in Touch

To get in touch with nurse navigation services and the survivorship program, call (805) 219-4673

» Mellissa Matheson

## 'It's a hard path, but it's doable'

*Breast cancer patient keeps attitude positive*

**Jennifer Best**

JBEST@BESTFAMILYADVENTURES.COM

**A** child helped discover Mellissa Matheson's breast cancer last April. Her family helped carry her through treatment and recovery.

"My daughter was crawling on me and pressed on the side of my breast. It hurt. When I felt it, there was a lump, but I thought maybe it was just hormones," the 27-year-old mother of three said.

With no history of cancer in her family,



Louis Escobar, Reflections Photography Studio

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Mellissa Matheson and her children, from top, Marilyn, Allen and Liam.

» Jared Richards

'Now I know how I need to live my life'

*Cancer diagnosis changes outlook for survivor*

**Jennifer Best**

JBEST@BESTFAMILYADVENTURES.COM

**I**f 19-year-old Jared Richards of yore could meet 21-year-old Jared Richards of today, they wouldn't recognize each other.

The teenage version pushed the limits.

"I was reckless to the point I would go out with friends and do dumb things that were kind of borderline. I was used to doing things that bordered on getting me hurt," Richards said.

He didn't enjoy working, though he held two jobs. He didn't enjoy anything, really.

"I was very unhappy. I was letting myself be unhappy, not allowing myself to be thankful for everything I have around me," Richards said.

Fast forward through one cancer diagnosis and six rounds of chemotherapy and Richards says he's focused on school, exercise and maintaining a healthy diet. He won't eat fast food, doesn't drink soda.

"If I were to go back in time and meet myself, I probably wouldn't recognize this person I've become because this whole experience changed me a lot, changed my mindset. Now I know how I need to live my life and make sure every day is going to be a great day, and my mentality is going to positive to make it a great day," he said.

His journey through cancer began after a going away party at a friend's house.

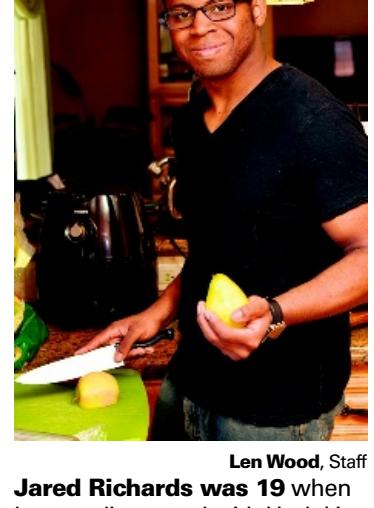
"I was in a bounce house I probably shouldn't have been in anyway doing back flips. I thought I kinked my neck, but I thought nothing of it because I was used to getting myself hurt," he said.

When the pain didn't subside, he checked in with a chiropractor who advised him to seek further medical aid.

At the hospital, Richards was diagnosed with Hodgkin's Lymphoma.

"The lymph nodes throughout the body swell up in multiple tumors. There was one the size of a volleyball in my chest. There

See RICHARDS, Page 4



**Jared Richards** was 19 when he was diagnosed with Hodgkin's lymphoma. After treatment, he said he's turned his life around, eating healthier and making better, safer decisions for his future.



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# THE SECOND ANNUAL Day of Hope

AT MISSION HOPE CANCER CENTER, we understand that cancer not only affects those with the disease; it affects an entire community. This is why our experienced medical professionals are dedicated to more than just medicine. We believe that life is about the remarkable moments—the big things, the little things, and everything in between—and knowing you have a partner in health to make sure you can enjoy them.

As one of only three accredited Comprehensive Community Cancer Center programs between Los Angeles and San Francisco, Mission Hope Cancer Center features advanced, lifesaving technology and physicians from the nation's most esteemed medical schools and training programs. This state-of-the-art cancer center is the first integrated oncology facility on the Central Coast, uniting Santa Maria oncology treatment, imaging, research, education, and support services at one convenient location for patients and families.

A single dollar doesn't buy much these days, but with the purchase of a \$1 special edition Day of Hope *Santa Maria Times* newspaper, you have the power to make a meaningful impact in the lives of Central Coast cancer patients at Mission Hope Cancer Center. On behalf of Mission Hope Cancer Center's physicians, nurses, volunteers—and most importantly, our patients—we thank you for your support of Day of Hope!

## Dawn Hinchman: Living life to the fullest beyond cancer



Dawn Hinchman's post-cancer journey of self-discovery has included an adventure in roping and riding with the Chicks 'n Chaps rodeo clinic.

ACCORDING TO breast cancer survivor Dawn Hinchman, the journey of cancer was not only a good thing—it was a true gift.

"I often tell people that having cancer was the best thing that ever happened to me," explains Dawn.

Although many with cancer feel they gain a new sense of appreciation for living, Dawn developed a new lease on life long before her diagnosis. In 2003, Dawn's husband passed away from cancer after melanoma metastasized to his lungs. At the time, Dawn thought her husband's death was unfair and something she couldn't handle. But amidst her grief, Dawn chose to embrace a positive lifestyle, changing everything from her personality to her routine.

"After my husband died, I learned that falling down is life. Getting back up is living," affirms Dawn.

In 2013, Dawn's annual mammogram screening led to a breast

cancer diagnosis. She immediately turned to the experts at Mission Hope Cancer Center, where she embarked on a journey of surgeries and radiation treatment.

"It may sound strange, but I looked forward to my radiation treatments," says Dawn with a smile. "The staff and my radiation oncologist, Dr. Jeffrey Wu,

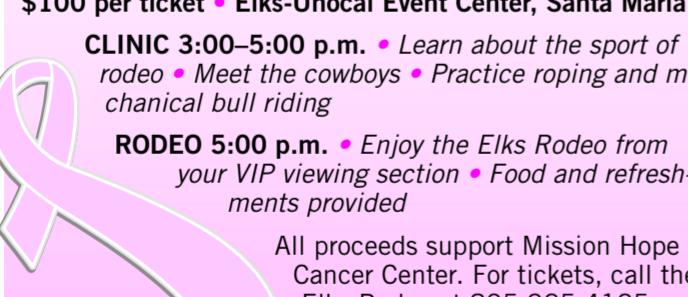
### Cowgirl Up... with "Cowboys Kickin' Cancer!"

Santa Maria Elks Rodeo VIP "Cowboys Kickin' Cancer" PARTY AND RODEO CLINIC • Saturday, May 30, 2015 \$100 per ticket • Elks-Uncal Event Center, Santa Maria

CLINIC 3:00-5:00 p.m. • Learn about the sport of rodeo • Meet the cowboys • Practice roping and mechanical bull riding

RODEO 5:00 p.m. • Enjoy the Elks Rodeo from your VIP viewing section • Food and refreshments provided

All proceeds support Mission Hope Cancer Center. For tickets, call the Elks Rodeo at 805.925.4125.



## Kristin Alexander: Day of Hope 2015 Ambassador

WHEN KRISTIN ALEXANDER was just 18 years old, her mother was diagnosed with breast cancer—and despite her mother's will to live, within just five years cancer claimed her life.

For many, a cancer diagnosis can take away one's sense of self-assurance and control. It can also have a frightening effect on family members' sense of security. But for Kristin, she watched her mother turn a painful experience of chemotherapy, radiation, and numerous surgeries, into a loving period surrounded by family.

Throughout the next 20 years, Kristin remained vigilant about her health and the importance of early detection, but at age 40, the healthy mother of two was about to face yet another shocking hurdle: a breast cancer diagnosis.

"Following my first appointment at Mission Hope Cancer Center, I realized there was hope," recounts Kristin. "Once I met Dr. Rocco, I could let the air out of my lungs. Also Liz Elliott, the nurse navigator, answered all my questions along the way, making



Kristin uses her newfound passion for life as a cancer survivor to lead free exercise classes for other cancer patients.

me informed, comfortable, and at ease."

The journey of cancer can turn a patient's world upside down. However, many patients like Kristin find that amidst the loss, there is something to be gained—a new perspective on life. Whether it is a cuddle on the couch or having energy to go for a walk, Kristin now cherishes every seemingly insignificant moment. And with her newfound passion for life as a cancer survivor, Kristin made one of her lifelong dreams a reality by opening a fitness studio, offering free exercise classes to anyone battling cancer.



## Cancer Rehabilitation Program: Improving lives through exercise

MARIAN CANCER CARE'S Cancer Rehabilitation Program includes group, individual, and aquatic exercise, designed to help you meet your fitness goals. Working in collaboration with Mission Hope Cancer Center physicians, the exercise program provides a multitude of health benefits for cancer patients and survivors.

Research has shown that through exercise, cancer patients can:

- Reduce treatment symptoms such as fatigue or reduced flexibility
- Decrease risk of cancer recurrence
- Normalize insulin levels
- Improve circulation of immune cells
- Improve quality of sleep

The 12-week program is tailored to each individual and allows participants to exercise in a safe environment surrounded by other cancer patients and survivors. In addition to attending one weekly group exercise class led by a cancer exercise trainer, referred patients also receive an exercise assessment from an expert cancer exercise specialist, nutritional consultation from a registered dietitian, two physical therapy evaluations, and lifelong knowledge to implement exercise throughout treatment and survivorship.

To start your personal path to wellness, call 805.346.3413 today!

## Debbie Rothanzl: Three-time survivor fights cancer with faith

IN 2005, DEBBIE ROTHANZL visited Marian Regional Medical Center's Emergency Department in seek of relief from severe abdominal and back pain. What she learned at the conclusion of her visit would forever change her life.

"A CT scan revealed a mass in my abdomen the size of a large head of cauliflower," remembers Debbie. "I was diagnosed with stage three non-Hodgkin lymphoma. It was such a shock. I felt like I was in a blender spinning and spinning."

She was immediately scheduled for surgery, and under the direction of medical oncologist Robert Dichmann, MD, Debbie began an aggressive chemotherapy regimen to combat the disease. Following chemotherapy, Debbie's tumor significantly shrank to the



size of an egg and later to just the size of a quarter. With her tumor reduced to a fraction of its original size, Debbie underwent a second surgery to remove the remainder of the cancerous mass.

After defeating non-Hodgkin lymphoma, Debbie was on cloud

nine. However, her feelings of euphoria would soon collapse as she developed a cancer recurrence less than a year later. Debbie again began chemotherapy treatments and underwent a bone marrow transplant. The combination of treatments and the bone marrow

transplant allowed Debbie to once again beat cancer, but within just months she developed a new type of non-Hodgkin lymphoma: follicular lymphoma.

Although devastated, Debbie did not let a third cancer diagnosis derail her mission to beat the disease. Trusting in her faith and supported by her loving family and team of expert caregivers at Mission Hope Cancer Center, Debbie began radiation, chemotherapy, and clinical trials treatments.

In the summer of 2014, Debbie's oncologist put her on a new breakthrough chemotherapy, and with the new treatment, Debbie has made significant strides.

"I'm now 42 and honestly, there was a period of time I wasn't sure if I'd make it to 40," confesses Debbie. "I'm human; I was scared

to death."

"I'm back to being a wife and mother. I feel so blessed."

## A Benefit for Marian Cancer Care at Mission Hope Cancer Center

### Azalia Garcia: A journey of hope



Azalia Garcia shares a smile with her mentors who have helped her through the cancer process, Dr. April Kennedy (right) and Jenni Davis.

awaking, Azalia lost the ability to use her legs, and spent the following month at Marian Extended Care Center, where she received physical rehabilitation to learn how to walk again.

Although cancer treatment and physical rehabilitation remains the most challenging journey Azalia has faced, the care she has received at Mission Hope Cancer Center has made all the difference.

"Even though cancer is terrible, the professionals at Mission Hope have made it the best possible experience," states Azalia. "I

feel so very fortunate I have an advocate in my oncologist, Dr. April Kennedy. She treats me as if I am a sister, not just a number, and I know she has my best interests at heart. Medical appointments can be intimidating, and she takes the extra time to go over all the details of the disease in a manner I can understand."

As a Marian Cancer Care patient at Mission Hope Cancer Center, Azalia and her family appreciate the center's welcoming atmosphere and its staff, who are always willing to go the extra mile for patients. Jenni Davis, Oncology Counselor and Patient Advocate, is just one of the center's many special team members who does everything in her power to help patients in need.

"Jenni was our angel. She was there for us when we needed help, providing our family with the resources to secure grant assistance to cover health insurance premiums," shares Azalia.

Currently Azalia is in remission, but continues maintenance chemotherapy to decrease her risk of recurrence. In appreciation for the care Azalia received throughout her cancer journey, Azalia and her family and Azalia's husband's employer brightened the spirits of others this past holiday season by donating hundreds of poinsettias to the caregivers and patients of Mission Hope Cancer Center and Marian Extended Care Center.

As a Mission Hope Cancer Center patient, Roseann was provided with an expert team of medical professionals who guided her through surgery, chemotherapy treatments, and radiation therapy. In addition to the physical burden of painful surgeries and draining treatments, Roseann faced another battle: while undergoing difficult cancer treatments, Roseann experienced multiple episodes of fainting due to a heart arrhythmia condition. Thus, it was necessary for Roseann to have a cardiac pacemaker implanted to maintain



On her final day of her chemotherapy regimen, Roseann Carroll (right) celebrated with Dr. Todd Erickson.

### Roseann Carroll: Celebrating hope and healing

WHEN ROSEANN CARROLL was diagnosed with an aggressive form of breast cancer in November of 2013, fear of the unknown consumed her.

"After learning of my diagnosis, I was truly frightened," explains Roseann. "However, my anxieties melted away after coming to Mission Hope for care. Everyone at Mission Hope became my partners in my cancer journey, reassuring me that we would get through this together."

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normal heart rate and rhythm. Like all cancer patients completing their final chemotherapy treatment, Roseann commemorated this meaningful victory alongside the center's infusion nurses, who serenaded her with a celebratory "Happy Last Chemo to You" song. Knowing the importance of this special day, Roseann's husband, Barry, also joined in the celebration by bringing cake and balloons to share with the center's staff and fellow patients.

Now, Roseann is cancer-free and soon plans to help others affected by cancer by serving as a Mission Hope Cancer Center volunteer.

"I feel so fortunate that there's an amazing state-of-the-art cancer center just 20 minutes from my door," reflects Roseann. "I was lucky; my cancer was likely to spread, but due to an annual mammogram it was caught early. I am proof of the importance of early detection, and now I make all my friends promise to get their regular mammogram screenings."

## The Rise of Genetics: New genetic counseling and testing program predicts cancer risk

### THE STREAMLINED PROCESS

- 1 Your physician determines whether you meet the guidelines for genetic counseling
- 2 Discuss genetic health risks and family history with genetic counselor
- 3 Appropriate testing, treatment, and care plan are provided

### A Meeting of Expert Minds: Tumor Boards take medicine beyond standard clinical care

BEING DIAGNOSED with cancer is a life-altering event, and Mission Hope Cancer Center's Tumor Boards are just one example of how the center's oncology team is committed to going the extra mile for patients.

An important advantage of receiving treatment at Mission Hope Cancer Center is its Tumor Boards, where a vast array of expert medical professionals present and discuss every newly diagnosed patient case.

With two weekly Tumor Boards, one is dedicated to the review of all breast cancer cases

and training programs with exemplary credentials and wide-ranging specialty expertise. Although these experts have received training from and practiced at the country's top medical institutions, they have chosen to live on the Central Coast and have dedicated their lives to helping those with cancer.

The many skilled physicians and health care professionals who participate in Mission Hope Cancer Center's Tumor Boards come to our community from the nation's most prestigious medical centers and training programs with exemplary credentials and wide-ranging specialty expertise. Although these experts have received training from and practiced at the country's top medical institutions, they have chosen to live on the Central Coast and have dedicated their lives to helping those with cancer.

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The many skilled physicians and health care professionals who participate in Mission Hope Cancer Center's Tumor Boards

## Matheson

From Page 1

she decided to give it a few weeks. Maybe it would heal, or just disappear as mysteriously as it had appeared.

"It didn't go away," she said.

After a regular checkup, her gynecologist sent her in for an ultrasound and MRI biopsy. The tests confirmed Matheson had bilateral breast cancer — cancerous tissue in both breasts.

"I was in denial at first; kind of shocked, but I knew I had to get through it because I have three kids," she said.

Dr. Monica Rocco and Dr. April Kennedy walked Matheson through the treatment schedule, medications,

potential side effects and surgeries.

While she had insurance, the coverage did not include one genetic test the doctors felt was necessary prior to radiation treatment. Marian Regional Medical Center's Cancer Care Program stepped in to find more than \$3,000 in grant funding to cover the expense.

"Through experience and watching other people, I've learned you have to stay positive through it all. If you're negative, it just makes the whole experience that much worse," Matheson said.

Through six rounds of chemotherapy, radical double mastectomy, additional surgeries and treatments, Matheson depended upon a network of family and friends to help juggle the needs of her children,

and her own medical needs.

Her aunt, Joyce Moiha, bought a wig for Matheson when chemotherapy took her hair. Husband Ryan Matheson juggled a busy work schedule with the added duties and pressure at home. Her mother, Tammy Emerson, grandmother, June Emerson, and aunt, Gerry Campbell, stepped in to take care of the kids as needed and to provide other support. Friend Becky Taylor sat by her side through just about every chemotherapy treatment.

With two more Herceptin treatments to go and more reconstructive surgery on the horizon, Matheson said she's learned a thing or two.

"It's a hard path, but it's doable. If I can get through it, anyone can," she said.

so I've made a life decision to stay away from anything that we know may bring it back," Richards said.

He refuses to eat red meat, limits his food intake to fruits, vegetables, fish and chicken, and goes to the gym at least four times a week.

"It brought me to a revelation to where I want to enjoy my life to the fullest, but everything I can control: the way my body is; the things I eat; the things I'm around. I've cut doing stupid things down," he said.

He's studying biology and hopes to work in forensic science, then go to medical school. He appreciates his friends and family.

"The people around me had a lot of strength to put forward and helped me realize I have so much more to live for, that I wanted to fight every day to make sure I'm there for the people around me. They put everything aside to make sure I was OK. They're

people I care about, and I care about them greatly," Richards said.

Today, he focuses on regaining and maintaining his health.

"I want to be the best I can be so it won't happen again. I know there are a lot more people out there who have it a lot worse than me. I've met a lot of terminal people who still hold onto hope and are trying to live life to the fullest. I feel like I was lucky to catch it early. I don't feel like I should live in the past in that I had it, but live for the future," Richards said.

And if he were to meet that 19-year-old self?

"I would tell myself to change my lifestyle for the better earlier, to work toward finding happiness and making my body completely healthy all the time. I'd tell myself, yeah, you'll miss Taco Bell, but I realize it's a short-term loss for a long-term goal. I'm able to miss Taco Bell if that means I'm able to live a longer life," Richards said.

## Nurses

From Page 1

battle will be the one that goes on in your head."

"I was put on this earth to do this job. It's very rewarding, sometimes very difficult. There's a lot of sadness, but it makes me appreciate my life more and to know I've done the best I could for someone. I can't change their situation, but if I can make it better, then that makes it worthwhile," she said.

### Survivorship program

Hunt, who covers patients with all other forms of cancer and heads up the survivorship program, is uniquely qualified for the position.

"I'm a survivor myself. I know how hard it is to get what you feel you need when you feel you need it. I know from my own experiences, and I have follow-up just like everyone else," he said.

Hunt was 24 when he was diagnosed with leukemia. He thought he had mononucleosis, or maybe a sinus infection.

"I didn't even know what leukemia was," he said.

In 1994, the survival rate for that particular form of cancer was less than 50 percent, doctors told Hunt.

"The next day, I started chemo and the whole nine yards," he said.

He went through cranial radiation, total body radiation and, in 1995, a bone marrow transplant. He's had his left hip replaced and awaits a right hip replacement. Doctors told him he'd be lucky to live to age 40, handed him some pain killers so he could eat, then sent him home to recover.

"You're on your own trying to figure out where to go. It would have been really helpful to have someone there to help after the treatments were over. When you're going through treatment, you have really good support: infusion nurses see you all

the time; your doc sees you on a regular timeframe; but afterward, there was no one," said Hunt, now 44.

Though he had been studying biology with plans to go into microbiology or forensics, his professional goals were forever changed by his cancer treatment experience, particularly the care provided by charge nurses.

"The people who got me through my treatments were my friends and family and nurses. It was the charge nurses who were there at night to take care of me, chart, talk to me. It was the buddies who tried to sneak in with me. Not everyone has that. That makes it tough," Hunt said.

C-word in the room," Hunt said.

The advice and education the nurse navigators provide runs from explaining technical details of treatment to simple pointers like, "Bring a friend or family member with you when you get your diagnosis."

"Sometimes patients hear one thing and the person they bring hears something completely different. You hear what you want to hear, not what they're telling you. Bring someone with you, an extra set of ears, someone to write things down. If the doctor will let you, bring a tape recorder," Hunt said.

## New treatments

Elliott reminds patients that the tales of woe and treatment terror told by cancer patients of old no longer apply.

"People have preconceived notions about what cancer is. Everyone's journey is different. We've made a lot of strides with breast cancer," Elliott said.

In all her years as a nurse certified in oncology care, she's seen tremendous change in diagnosis and treatment.

"The changes I've seen are amazing. We have a lot more testing today that can tell us things we could never see before. We can look at a lot more variables, the pathology of aggressiveness. We are also leaning toward wellness, diet, exercise, stress reduction. All these things play a role in some way, and may play a role definitely in the way they recover," Elliott said.

The cancer center provides yoga classes, cancer exercise programs, and dieticians to help patients embrace that healthier lifestyle.

"It's not going to be easy, but they're stronger than they think they are. They'll be able to get through it. They'll look back and see they're a changed person. I like people to know they can get through it, to look back and be able to recognize it's probably the hardest thing they ever did, but they did it," Elliott said.

## Richards

From Page 1

were more in my neck, stomach and under my arms," he said.

Family members had to convince the youth that the diagnosis was serious, and when the news finally sunk in, so did the anxiety.

"I was offered counseling because I would get sick right when I would walk into Mission Hope (Cancer Center). At the smell of chemo, the anxiety would hit me. They offered me a therapist to help me through that," Richards said.

He started meditating to focus his energy away from the mechanics of the treatment. He took leave from one of two jobs and classes at Cuesta College while he went through treatments, and decided on a new path for his life.

"This can happen to anyone. At this point, they don't know why. There are some things that activate cancer cells,

so I've made a life decision to stay away from anything that we know may bring it back," Richards said.

Today, he focuses on regaining and maintaining his health.

"I want to be the best I can be so it won't happen again. I know there are a lot more people out there who have it a lot worse than me. I've met a lot of terminal people who still hold onto hope and are trying to live life to the fullest. I feel like I was lucky to catch it early. I don't feel like I should live in the past in that I had it, but live for the future," Richards said.

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# Thanks to Our Generous 2015 Day of Hope Sponsors

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