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Couple honored for cancer research work

By Alison Swade
aswade@mysuburbanlife.com

Warren Buffet once said, "Someone's sitting in the shade today because someone planted a tree a long time ago."

That person was Scott Seaman, a Bartlett resident who was recently honored for planting trees for cancer patients throughout Chicago.

Seaman and his wife, Charlene McMann-Seaman, were recently honored at a dinner for starting the first Chicago chapter of the Lymphoma Research Foundation after he was diagnosed with non-Hodgkins lymphoma nine years ago.

"I thought I was a dead man," said Seaman, a commercial lawyer for Meckler, Bulger & Tilson LLP in Chicago. "In fact, I turned to my wife and said, 'I'm a dead man.'"

Seaman told his wife he did not want to undergo chemotherapy, as many of his friends were killed from the symptoms alone. "I said you better, or I will kill you — these are your options," his wife joked.

The couple had been on their way to Disney World when Seaman started experiencing pain in his chest. Hours later, he was in a doctor's office being told he had two tumors the size of baseballs that needed to be removed.

Charlene, who has lost her father, two grandfathers, a grandmother and an aunt to cancer, was outraged.

"When he got cancer at 36, that's when I said enough," Charlene said. "You are not taking my husband."

Charlene contacted the Lymphoma Research Foundation headquarters in New York, where she spoke to a woman who convinced her lymphoma was not a death sentence. Years later, Charlene said it was this woman who inspired her and her husband to start the first chapter outside of New York.

"When I got through chemotherapy — now I'm a lawyer so I never think of helping people — my wife said, 'we have to help other people get back on track,'" Seaman said.

They began with the Lymphomathon, a 5k walk-run at Montrose Harbor, which drew 400 people. Chicago's Lymphomathon this past August raised \$415,000, contributing to its five-year total, \$1.6 million.



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Staff photo by Steve Bittinger

Scott Seaman, who was diagnosed with lymphoma nine years ago, and his wife, Charlene McMann-Seaman, glance over an award they received at a dinner sponsored by the Lymphoma Research Foundation. The couple helped form the first Chicago chapter and raised over \$2 million for cancer research.

Since the Chicago chapter began, 22 other chapters have opened. The couple has raised \$2 million overall, and were honored at an awards dinner that raised \$300,000 and dedicated a tree to be planted in their name.

As the president of the Chicago chapter, Charlene believes it is important for the chapter to pair survivors with those recently diagnosed with cancer.

"If you are diagnosed and talk to someone who is a nine-year survivor, it makes them hopeful to know they are still alive and

living," she said.

Charlene encourages public education, as she found few people are aware of lymphoma though it is the most common type of blood cancer and third most common cancer to children. Nearly 500,000 Americans are affected by lymphoma every year, according to the Lymphoma Research Foundation.

Doing well now, Seaman recently spoke at a conference in Los Angeles, where he talked of his experience as a cancer survivor.

"I said, 'People usually tell you surviving cancer makes you look at life differently,'" he explained. "Then I asked everyone who was grateful they had cancer to raise their hands, and I said 'Well, I'm happy for you, but cancer ruined my life.'"

However, with a smile on his face, Seaman pointed out there are now more moments in his life that stand out.

The couple did take that trip to Disney World, 10 months after he was diagnosed. They agreed it was best trip they ever took.