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Amicus Curious

Fight against a disease becomes a campaign

By Pat Milhizer
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Scott M. Seaman was about to head off for a vacation trip to Disney World when pains in his chest made him realize he should see a doctor first.

The trip was quickly put on hold when the physician told Seaman that the discomfort was being caused by two tumors that were as big as baseballs. It was about nine years ago, and Seaman learned that he had non-Hodgkin lymphoma.

"You're stunned because you hear the 'cancer' word, but you never expect that it's going to be you," said Seaman, 45, a trial attorney who handles commercial litigation, insurance and reinsurance matters at Meckler, Bulger & Tilson LLP.

"So you're sitting there with your calendar and your caseload and all of your work that you've got. And all of a sudden you're not in control of your life anymore."

After the surgery, he kept working as much as he could during the nine months of chemotherapy and radiation treatments.

When he recovered, his wife, Charlene, had one request.

"We're not done yet," she told him. "We're going to work, help people and make sure that there are better treatments available and do what we can do."

With that, the couple began an effort to help fund lymphoma research and provide guidance to others with lymphoma, a blood cancer. Their efforts will be recognized on Oct. 30 by the Lymphoma Research Foundation.

When Seaman was diagnosed in the late 1990s, there wasn't a wealth of information online about disease. So his wife contacted an agency in New York that merged with a similar agency in California in 2001 to form the Lymphoma Research Foundation.

The new organization wanted to develop chapters, and Seaman and his wife helped start the first one in Chicago. Since then, the Chicago chapter has served as a blueprint for 22 others that followed.

In 2003, Charlene McMann-Seaman chaired the first fundraiser that the group held — a run and walk called the Lymphomathon — and about 300 to 400 people attended. The group hoped to raise \$50,000 for the Lymphoma Research Foundation, and it took in nearly triple the estimate.

The fund-raiser continued each year, and this year's event at Montrose Harbor in August drew 2,300 participants and brought the total raised by all five annual events to \$1.4 million.

The executive director of the foundation's Chicago office called Seaman the "spirit" of the event.

"He is a leader in the truest sense, creating excitement, inspiring people to raise money and making them feel good about their involvement and contributions. And his wife Charlene is right there along side of him, doing the same thing. They work really well together," Amy Junge said.

The Chicago chapter is expected to increase the total fund-raising effort to \$2 million with other activities and the inaugural awards dinner at which Seaman, his wife and DLA Piper US LLP paralegal Laura Colton Tepper, co-chair of the 2007 Lymphomathon,



Scott M. Seaman

Paul McGrath

will be honored with the Tribute Award.

Last year, Seaman delivered the keynote address at the North American Forum on Lymphoma in Los Angeles, talking about how lymphoma had affected him and about his work to raise money and awareness to fight the cancer.

Seaman said he's fortunate that he could continue working through his illness.

"Because to me, that was my outlet — to be able to focus on my clients' problems and their cases rather than my illness. And the firm was very supportive of me and the clients were very supportive," Seaman said.

"The support was absolutely remarkable. To this day, a lot of the client contacts call me and come to me because, as you can imagine, so many of them wind up with cancer," Seaman said. "No matter how smart you are, no matter how talented you are in your profession, when you get into something like that, you need somebody you can talk to."

For more information about the organization and next year's Lymphomathon, visit www.lymphoma.org.