



12TH ANNUAL Chicago
prostate
cancer
walk/run

September 11th, 2016
Lincoln Park

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SEA
Stories

*An Interview with Myrna Porter,
Founder of the SEA Blue Prostate
Cancer Walk & Run...*

SEA Blue Founders
Myrna Porter and
Russ Gould

How did you come to start SEA Blue?

In 1998 I was diagnosed with breast cancer and shortly thereafter my friend, Linda Murphy, and I began the process of networking and raising money to start Wellness Place in Palatine, Illinois. By 2002, Wellness Place was well established and already known as a wonderful support facility for cancer survivors and their families. So it was an easy “jump” to connect with Us TOO International to establish the first prostate cancer walk in Illinois.

My husband was diagnosed with advanced prostate cancer in the spring of 2002 and we began attending the Us TOO Support Group run by Russ Gould in Palatine. We were very impressed with the knowledge of the group, Russ’s expertise and management abilities. I felt that I could initiate a means of financial support, as well as visibility to a very worthy cause, close to my heart and my husband’s heart. I obviously felt I needed the expertise and assistance of Us TOO. There were three SEA Blue founders, Russ Gould, Shirley Grey and myself. Russ was on the board of directors at Us TOO, Shirley was very involved with several projects at the Us TOO home office, and I was still on the board at Wellness Place. In 2005 we started the first walk & run which was held in Busse Woods. We named it “The Greater Chicago Prostate Cancer Run, Walk n’ Roll.”

What was the first year like?

We were pretty pleased with our success the first year. We knew it was a good start and also knew that we could improve on it each and every year, at least we were hoping for that. Attendance was about 700. I asked around for a person who could manage the event and came up with Amy Woods, who still runs the event today. She has done a great job throughout the years and we remain close friends today. Her father had prostate cancer also, so she was committed to the cause.

My next move was to search for corporate sponsors. I contacted Mary McGregor, a close friend who is very much like a daughter, who was an executive at TAP Pharmaceutical Products. That first year TAP made all the difference. They were a great supporter in years that followed as well. Not only were they our major financial contributor, but they did a wonderful job of recruiting their employees and family members to attend the walk & run.

In 2006, the walk & run was moved downtown at the suggestion of our major sponsor. With that move, I believe we took a major step forward. We were able to double the funding from TAP and obtain other major sponsors. It was that year when we increased our attendance by about 300. Our first downtown event was in Grant Park. It was moved to Lincoln Park and has remained there ever since.

There were a number of Chicago celebrities who got involved once we moved downtown. Antonio Mora, the news anchor, was our first MC. WGN’s Robert Jordan who is a weekend anchor and prostate cancer survivor and WGN anchor, Steve Sanders also participated over the years. The Jesse White Tumblers have been at every event since the first or second year.

During our early years we had some support from the medical community, but I think that is much more developed at this point. Some significant educational components take place at the walk for families and survivors, which I believe is a great thing as it provides easy access for the community of survivors.

My goal was always to get the prostate cancer walk up and running and successful -- and pass it on, which we did. I am very proud that it still exists and is thriving today.

What changes have you seen over the years?

Some of the core aspects of the event remain the same. The support, commitment and passion for the cause remain the same. The camaraderie of those attending is always present and very rewarding. Even if I miss a year of attendance at the walk, I still remember the joy of being with a large group of individuals heavily connected to a cause that makes a difference in the lives of those affected by prostate cancer. Sadly, in December 2014 we lost Russ Gould who was a great friend, leader, and inspiration for the cause. He is greatly missed by everyone involved with the event and by the prostate cancer community as a whole.

Can you reflect on a particularly positive memory from the event?

With the exception of losing a few individuals we were not able to help who were dear to my heart, my husband Stu, Russ Gould and others, the memories have all been positive. As I said before, there is nothing like knowing that you have been part of making a difference in other people's lives. When I reflect on the past, I think about the strong friendships and beautiful relationships that I built, and certainly Russ Gould from Us TOO was one of them, as was Shirley Grey, Amy and the staff at Us TOO.

What do you hope to see in the coming years?

Perhaps my only disappointment is that we have not increased our attendance to a level that we would like to see it. It would be wonderful to see several thousand individuals participate.

Thank you for your time and for your commitment to this important cause.

For more information on SEA Blue, to register, or to donate, visit www.SEABlueProstateWalk.org.

