

Cancer support for life provided at the The Wellness Community

By Constance Grady and Scott Bluebond, Marketing and Communications Department at The Wellness Community of Philadelphia

When Stanley Elam, a resident of Germantown, was diagnosed with thyroid cancer in February of this year, he had already fought bad odds and beat them on more than one occasion. A Vietnam veteran, he was also diagnosed with a heart condition in 2004, and had made a recovery. "I didn't know too much about the cancer," he said. "All I knew was that I was going to fight, and I was going to survive."

As situations for fighting cancer go, Elam's wasn't bad. He had a supportive family, he saw excellent physicians, he was able to find solace in religion, and he was determined to fight off the illness. Still, he found that he needed something extra for his fight against cancer, something beyond the support systems that he already had in place. For him, The Wellness Community of Philadelphia became that extra support. "I needed more," says Elam, "and they provided me with more."

The Wellness Community of Philadelphia (TWCP) is a non-profit organization dedicated to providing free cancer support, education and hope to people with cancer and their loved ones. TWCP is one of 24 worldwide chapters of The Wellness Community—National. Although TWCP is based in Fairmount Park, it offers off-site programs throughout the Greater Philadelphia area. Elam was introduced to TWCP through its support group at the Family Practice & Counseling Network in Germantown.

The Wellness Community of

Philadelphia exists to give those affected by cancer a safety net. "Upon hearing you have cancer, oftentimes you're in a daze," says TWCP assistant program director Karen Neyer. "You get all kinds of information from your doctor, but it can be diffi-

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cult to absorb it all upon hearing the news of a cancer diagnosis."

In order to assist those affected by cancer, TWCP offers programs at no charge to participants. Programs and services include professionally-led weekly support groups for survivors and caregivers; nutrition, yoga, Tai Chi and aerobic exercise classes; mind-body programs; special programs for children and grandchildren of people with cancer; educational forums and expressive arts. The goal of all TWCP programs is to support people with cancer and their loved ones and help them care for themselves through treatment and beyond, to manage change and uncertainty, and to form successful partnerships with their health care providers.

This emphasis on empowering patients is central to The Wellness Community of Philadelphia's philosophy. Known as the "patient active concept," the idea was created by The Wellness Community—National founder Harold D. Benjamin. In his words, "People with cancer who participate in their fight for recovery from cancer will improve the quality of their life and may enhance the possibility of their recovery."

For Elam, the most important programs that TWCP offers are

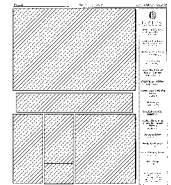
its support groups. "It's just great meeting people who've been through what I've been through," he says. "You can learn about your cancer, and how to deal with it, and how to help your family deal with it." TWCP support groups meet weekly and are facilitated by licensed psychotherapists.

TWCP is based in beautiful and historic Fairmount Park on 4.5 acres. For now, there is no door-to-door public transportation to TWCP's central location, making it a challenge for those without access to a car.

It is for this reason that TWCP has created offsite programs throughout Philadelphia. TWCP currently offers programs not only at the Family Practice & Counseling Network where Elam sees his support group, but also in North Philadelphia at Einstein Cancer Center and Temple University Hospital, in West Philadelphia at Haddington Multi-Services for Older Adults, Inc. and Mercy Philadelphia Hospital, in South Philadelphia at Tindley Temple United Methodist Church and in Center City at Hahnemann University Hospital.

"There are a lot of medically-underserved neighborhoods in this city," says community based program director Barbara Davis. "So what we're trying to do is to take our services to the people in those areas, so they don't have to travel to Fairmount Park to take advantage of what we have to offer."

What TWCP has to offer is something very valuable to the people with cancer in this city. It is the knowledge that, as Elam says, "Just because you have cancer doesn't mean it's the end of the world." TWCP



teaches people that it is possible to live full, rich lives with cancer, and shows them how to do just that.

The mission of The Wellness Community of Philadelphia is to help people affected by cancer

enhance their health and well-being through participation in a free professional program of emotional support, education and hope. TWCP offers programs at Ridgeland in Fair-

mount Park and throughout Philadelphia. Please call The Wellness Community of Philadelphia at (215) 879-7733 or toll free at (888) 819-3553. Visit TWCP's website at twcp.org for more information.



Participants at this year's *Celebration of Hope* educational conference, June 6, 2008.



Wellness Community of Philadelphia participants gather in front of Ridgeland Mansion.



Support groups help people with cancer and their loved ones at The Wellness Community of Philadelphia.