

In lieu of flowers: Cancer Patients Seminar

By Valerie Cranston

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Pictured from left are Jacob, Marlana, Christine and Shannon Shaw. Shannon was an AYSO certified soccer coach and referee who devoted his life to his children in sports activities, scouting and school work. (Submitted photo)

Evy and Jeff Diamond, parents of the late Shannon J. Shaw, are funding an Advocacy for Cancer Patients Seminar with enormous volunteer help from lawyers, physicians and friends. This seminar is scheduled for Friday, Oct. 21, at the Pecos River Village Conference Center, 711 Muscatel Ave.

Shannon's family and friends established a fund in his memory at the University of New Mexico Cancer Center following his death two years ago. The fund was to establish educational programs and clinics in medically underserved communities in the state.

The seminar includes three tracks: one for continuing legal education credit for lawyers, one for continuing medical education credits for physicians and one for the public that focuses on the prevention, early diagnosis and treatment of melanoma.



Evy and Jeff Diamond have spent months organizing and planning the first Advocacy for Cancer Patients Seminar to benefit the Shannon J. Shaw Memorial Cancer Fund of the University of New Mexico Cancer Center Foundation. Their son, Shannon, died of malignant melanoma.

"We're advocating to cancer patients," Jeff Diamond said, noting the public seminar is open for individuals to come and learn.

One hundred percent of the continuing education seminar tuition cost paid by lawyers and physicians will go to the Shannon J. Shaw Memorial Fund at UNM Cancer Center Foundation. The full day cancer education seminar is open to the public free of charge.

Shannon was a 1979 graduate of Carlsbad High School. After graduating from New Mexico Tech, he went to work at the local Bureau of Land Management for 10 years. He transferred to the Mineral Management Service, where he worked protecting the federal interest in offshore platform oil and gas production in California.

He then rejoined the BLM in 2007 in Santa Fe as a supervising petroleum engineer with oversight responsibilities in New Mexico, Texas, Oklahoma and Kansas.

Shannon, the loving father of Jacob and Marlina and devoted husband of Christine, died from malignant melanoma Aug. 31, 2009. He refused to listen to his wife or his mother, who nagged him for several years to have a nasty mole on his hip examined by a doctor.

Melanoma is a type of cancer originating from the cells that give color to the skin. These cells are called melanocytes. Some melanomas arise in normal skin and others arise in pigmented skin (moles). If melanoma is not detected early, it can be fatal. Most patients can be cured with minor surgery if found early.

"I first saw it (the mole) when he was working in the yard," his mother, Evy Diamond, said. "He had a stubborn streak and it was very difficult talking him into seeing a doctor."

When he finally went to see a dermatologist, the diagnosis was stage IV melanoma. For the next year, he fought the battle of his life with surgery, radiation and chemotherapy.

Prior to his death, he told both his children to "listen to your mom." He then asked his wife, Christine, and mother, Evy, to launch a campaign to help others avoid the pain suffered by his loved ones because of his stubbornness.

"Christine and I nagged Shannon for years. He'd say he'd get it checked, but he didn't. He'd say he was too busy," Evy said, noting when he finally went to the doctor, the melanoma had already invaded his lymph system.

Shannon went through surgeries, treatments and clinical trials and kept working. He would go to work early to take time off for the trials. During this same time, his wife developed breast cancer. Even with problems of her own, she continued to care for Shannon, Evy explained.

"Christine is a remarkably strong woman who took care of Shannon, herself, their children and continued to work," Evy said, noting Christine has since changed careers from a certified Montessori teacher and administrator to becoming a registered nurse.

Christine and their two children have since had moles removed. Evy has had surgery for squamous cell melanoma on her right thumb and the right side of her chin. She just recently had surgery on her nose to remove basal cell carcinoma.

"On his last trip to the family cabin in Ruidoso, Shannon said, 'I can't do this anymore,'" Evy said, noting he didn't want to go through any more treatment.

As his mother, she was there when he came into the world and she was there when he took his last breath at the age of 48, all the time thinking it is not supposed to be this way. A child is not supposed to die before the parent, she said.

All the information on the Website, www.listentoyourmom.org, demonstrates the urgency of preventing melanoma and educating the public about over-exposure to the sun and ultraviolet radiation.

The goal of the seminar is to advance advocacy, both legal and medical, on behalf of cancer patients. While the emphasis of the seminar is on malignant melanoma, substantial discussion about breast cancer, early detection, prevention and awareness will be included.

More than 480 minutes of legal education material will be presented live by practicing attorneys who are extremely knowledgeable on the subjects. The seminar will be broadcast live to the UNM Cancer Center auditorium and the BLM state office.

The luncheon dedication to Patty Jennings holds special meaning for the Diamonds. Patty was the wife of Tim Jennings, senate president pro tem. She died on Valentine's Day 2009 after fighting a long battle against breast cancer. She was best known for her selfless hours of work for special needs children and for ensuring that every New Mexican had access to health insurance and medical care.

"She is the kind of woman everyone wanted to listen to," said Jeff.

The bone marrow match transplant registration table will be hosted by local volunteers from Relay for Life. Finding a bone marrow match is so important because only 40 percent of those needing a transplant are able to get one, he explained.

United Blood Services will be available in the parking lot for those who wish to donate the gift of life.

"We're asking people to commit their time, money, blood, knowledge and maybe bone marrow to fight cancer," Jeff said, adding not one cent donated is being used for anything connected with the seminar.

A cocktail party and silent auction fundraiser sponsored by the Diamonds will follow the day's activities to benefit the UNM Cancer Center. The event is from 6:30-8:30 p.m. Friday at the Living Desert Zoo & Gardens State Park visitor's center and is open to the public. Honored guest

is Cheryl L. Willman, M.D., a cancer specialist and director and CEO of the UNM Cancer Center.

The silent auction will include several prints by renowned western artist Gary Morton, pottery and two special paintings by Maggie Oso, resident celebrity bear, which will hang in the children's wing at UNMCC. The United Mariachi of Loving will provide entertainment.

"It (the cocktail party) is open to the public, but we are asking for contributions," he said.

The Diamonds are also involved in SunWise, a partnership program with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. The program promotes being smarter about protecting your skin in the sun. The SunWise program is an environmental and health education program that aims to teach children and their caregivers how to protect themselves from overexposure to the sun through the use of classroom, school and community based components.

"SunWise was designed to teach children and their parents how dangerous unprotected exposure from the sun can be," Jeff said, noting the program is aimed at children in kindergarten through eighth grade.

The first Shannon Shaw Memorial "Gatherin' His Slack" Team Roping event is planned as an additional fundraiser beginning at 10 a.m. Saturday, Oct. 22, at the Eddy County Sheriff's Posse Arena. The event features the No BS Cattle Company with Harvey Smith and John Berry. All proceeds from this event will benefit the UNM Cancer Center. There will be belt buckles for the winners. Call (575) 626-6729 for more information.

"We expect this team roping event to grow in the future," said Jeff.

When the Diamonds began organizing and planning the seminar, the focus was to establish and enhance the network in southeastern New Mexico and make people aware of options here at home, he explained.

"You can get high quality cancer treatment in Carlsbad at Kymera and Carlsbad Advanced Radiation Therapy and in Roswell," he said.

The seminar programs designed to educate the public about melanoma and skin cancer and to provide outreach for the early diagnosis and treatment of melanoma is their way of seeing something good come out of a tragedy, like the senseless death of Shannon.

"It's been a real passion and labor of love and I'm very proud of Shannon and all he accomplished," said Jeff.

"Shannon loved being a dad and husband and he left such a great legacy," Evy said.

What: Advocacy for Cancer Patients Seminar

When: 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturday, Oct. 21

Where: Pecos River Village Conference Center, 711 Muscatel Ave.

Vital medical and legal issues addressed

1 What is the state of the art in radiation techniques available in the Pecos Valley?

1 Do you know the latest issues concerning early diagnosis and treatment of cancer?

1 What types of counseling and social services are available to terminal patients and their families?

1 New Mexico Insurance Code and Regulations: How do I get medical bills paid by insurance companies that should be paid?

1 What are the latest developments in diagnosis and treatment of breast cancer? What is available in southeastern New Mexico?

1 So your employer wants to fire you because you have continuing treatment. Now what?

1 Is there a future for Medicaid?

1 How do we build a strong community network with links to new cancer prevention, early diagnosis and treatment?

Public Seminar Agenda

8-8:30 a.m. Welcome by Monte Shaheen, M.D.

8:30-9:15 a.m. Will Parsons, Ph.D. - Coping with psychological problems for patients and their families

9:15-10 a.m. Carlos Hadzic, M.D. - IMRT and less invasive and tissue destructive therapies

10-10:15 a.m. Break - refreshments provided by Landsun Homes

10:15-11 a.m. Rita Siegel, Esq. - Keeping your job while getting cancer treatment

11-11:45 a.m. Julie Neerkan, Esq. - Employment and insurance rights of cancer patients

11:45 a.m.-1:15 p.m. Lunch - Dedicated to Patty Jennings, wife of senate president pro tem Tim Jennings, who died on Valentine's Day 2009 after a long, hard fight with breast cancer.

1:15-2 p.m. Monte Shaheen, M.D. - The latest information about clinical trials

2-2:45 p.m. Kyle Stock, Esq. - New insurance laws going into effect in 2012

2:45-3:15 p.m. Alvaro Alencar, M.D. - Advances in cancer treatment in southeastern New Mexico

3:15-3:30 p.m. Break - refreshments provided by Carlsbad Mental Health Center

3:30-4:15 p.m. Melanie Royce, M.D., Ph.D. - Latest developments and treatment for inflammatory breast cancer and other high risk cancers.

4:15-5 p.m. Panel discussion with questions and answers

There is no cost for the public to attend this special seminar. For more information, call 1(877) 622-3065.

Bone Marrow Donor Match Drive

Be the Match for Shannon

A marrow donor match drive will be held during the seminar. Please consider this opportunity to be the match for someone. For more information, please visit www.BeThe Match.org

Give Blood

United Blood Services will also be conducting a blood drive at this time. The blood donor van will be located in the parking lot.

Donations or contributions can be made by mailing the UNM Cancer Center Foundation/Shannon J. Shaw Memorial Fund, P.O. Drawer C, Carlsbad, NM, 88221. To learn more about the memorial fund visit: www.listentoyourmom.org