

# Teaming Up Against Cancer

Spend time with Cookie and Ron Markowitz and you soon realize they've woven two lives into one purpose. They're not just a couple: They are a team. Given what they hope to accomplish, they have to be.

"We are committed to finding a cure for cancer in our lifetime," explains Cookie. "We are committed to finding that cure in our lifetime, so that our children, grandchildren, and dear friends can live in a cancer-free world." It's a task Cookie approaches with single-minded determination, and Ron shares her dedication. "This is our life's work," he says.

The Markowitzes have been leaders in the fight to cure cancer for many years, playing key roles in some of the most dynamic cancer fund-raising activities in Southern California. In 1991, Cookie and Ron joined other couples, together with Sherry Lansing and the late Dr. Armand Hammer, to support STOP CANCER. The organization has raised more than \$42 million to fund scientists working in cancer research and clinical applications. Cookie and Ron went on to serve as presidents of STOP CANCER from 1999 to 2000. Today the organization has more than 600 members.

Over the last few years, however, the skill and commitment of the Cedars-Sinai medical teams inspired Cookie and Ron to make the Medical Center the central

focus of their mission. Their initial gift to Cedars-Sinai was the Cookie and Ron Markowitz Breast Cancer Tissue Bank, one of the first and the largest of its kind in the Western United States. The bank

preserves cancerous tissue samples for use in research, such as investigating new cancer markers for earlier diagnosis or to test new cancer-fighting drugs.

Cookie and Ron recently upped the stakes by establishing the Cookie and Ron Markowitz Cancer Research and Education Endowment. It is their latest and most ambitious attempt to turn the tide on a disease that has touched their lives too personally for either of them to consider faltering in the fight.

When she was 12, Cookie lost her grandmother to stomach cancer. "They treated her with cobalt," she remembers. "It was really all they had at the time. The treatment was almost as brutal as the disease. In those days, no one wanted to talk about it."

The fact that cancer can affect anyone at any time didn't really hit Cookie until much later. "So many of our friends have been diagnosed with the disease," she says. "Too many friends living healthy lives, eating healthy foods, and exercising daily, and yet they still get cancer." Then, almost nine years ago, it was her middle daughter, Tracy. The family rallied, and today Tracy is the proud mother of two beautiful young children.

Turning her experience with cancer into a personal mission came naturally to Cookie. "I always had a passion

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**On the Cover:** Cookie and Ron Markowitz, photographed in the lobby of the newly redesigned Outpatient Cancer Center at the Samuel Oschin Comprehensive Cancer Institute. (Photos by Eric Myer except where otherwise indicated)

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—COOKIE MARKOWITZ



to give,” she explains. “When I was 14 or 15, I started with a ‘Dollar a Day’ for the United Jewish Welfare Fund.” Indeed, Cookie has philanthropy in her DNA. Her grandparents, Meyer and Lillian Schuman, and her parents Sidney and Edith Schuman had a long standing tradition of giving to the Medical Center. The Shuman Building, which stood as part of the Mt. Sinai Hospital complex, was named in honor of their philanthropy. (It was seriously damaged in the 1994 Northridge earthquake. The Saperstein Critical Care Tower now stands where it was located.) Sidney Schuman was also a member of the Board of Directors and a treasurer of the Medical Center.

“That generation,” says Cookie, “was very philanthropic. Their dedication to Cedars-Sinai had no boundaries.” At 20, Cookie joined the hospital’s Board of Governors and Women’s Guild, an unusual step for someone so young. But it demonstrated the seriousness of her convictions and her family’s strong connection to Cedars-Sinai.

**R**on grew up in Carthay Circle, just south of Beverly Hills. He remembers when Decca Records had a manufacturing plant where Cedars-Sinai stands today. He retired from

the beverage industry in 1988 after selling his business to Coca-Cola. The following year, he met Cookie.

“It was a turning point in my life,” he says. “I was always working, I never left Los Angeles except on business.”

That quickly changed; the two have traveled to more than 25 countries and made philanthropy a shared mission. Cookie introduced Ron to Cedars-Sinai, her “second family.” He joined her on the Board of Governors and now advises the hospital as a member of the Building Committee. He also supports Cedars-Sinai in ways far less public but equally needed. “We’ll do whatever the hospital needs to get done.”

**R**on and Cookie’s most recent gift to Cedars-Sinai, their Cancer Research and Education Endowment, will fund programs at the Samuel Oschin Comprehensive Cancer Institute. The Markowitzes have been involved with the Institute from the beginning. “It serves more cancer patients than the other three cancer hospitals in Southern California combined,” Cookie notes, accurately adding that one out of every two people diagnosed with cancer in Southern California turns to Cedars-Sinai for a second opinion.

The couple values the Institute’s patient-centered cancer research, results-oriented clinical trials, and innovative care that treat the whole individual, not just the disease. The Outpatient Cancer Center is a shining example of that approach. It features soothing colors, live plants, colorful aquaria and special lighting that brings the outdoors inside to create a warm, comforting, and comfortable environment. It was the first in the nation to offer infusion therapy around the clock, giving cancer patients a measure of control over their lives when it is most needed.

From the beginning, Cookie and Ron wanted their endowment to have the greatest possible impact. By supporting cancer research at Cedars-Sinai, it will. “Cancer research is interdisciplinary,” explains Steven Piantadosi, MD, PhD, recruited from Johns Hopkins

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—RON MARKOWITZ

in 2006 to serve as director of the Samuel Oschin Comprehensive Cancer Institute. “A discovery in one area of research can have applications in multiple areas of treatment. The Markowitzes’ gift allows us to use the funds where they will do the most good.”

“This is a visionary gift,” says Shlomo Melmed, MD, senior vice president for Academic Affairs and dean of the Medical Faculty. “The endowment is both powerful and flexible. It enables Cedars-Sinai to support long-term programs in research as well as educational training for clinical trials.” This summer, the endowment will underwrite a groundbreaking education program that will bring clinicians and researchers from around the country to Cedars-Sinai to learn about the latest developments in cancer research and clinical treatments.

“The Markowitzes’ gift also means we can pursue broad-based, promising research because the funds are not restricted to a specific type of cancer or cancer research,” Dr. Melmed says.

**C**ookie and Ron would be the last ones to call themselves visionary. “I like to treat people the way I want to be treated!” says Cookie. That “can-do” spirit infuses everything the couple does. “If Cookie is doing something *that* important,” says Ron, “then we are going to do it together. I admire her. She’s disciplined. She makes things happen.”

For the couple, defeating cancer is the ultimate motivation. “A day doesn’t go by that I don’t hear a story,” Cookie points out. “We all know someone whose life has been affected by cancer. Just the other day, a friend’s eight-year-old grandson was diagnosed. One out of every three women and one out of every two men will get a cancer diagnosis in their lifetime. They are the reason Ron and I want to find a cure—and find it now.”

“Cancer is relentless,” says Cookie. “Everything and anything we can do to defeat it counts. My goal is to see it end. Never to hear the word again.” Ron is equally adamant. “This is where we put all our time and effort,” he says, “simply because this is where it is needed.” ■



PHOTOS BY THOMAS NEERKEN

*Opposite: Cookie's daughter, Tracy Forester, with husband Greg and their children, Grace and Jack. Above: (top) Ron and Cookie Markowitz with Shlomo Melmed, MD, and (bottom) with Beth Karlan, MD, director of the Cedars-Sinai Women's Cancer Research Institute at the dedication event for their Cancer Research and Education Endowment.*