SAULT AREA HOSPITAL FOUNDATION

Help us light up our

TREE of HOPE

Your gift can <u>keep care close to home.</u>

November 2025

Dear Friend,

Every appointment. Every test. Every procedure. *<u>It has all happened here</u>*.

Some might assume that, with a rare cancer diagnosis in Northern Ontario, you'd have to travel out of town to get the care you need. Gabe Stefanizzi certainly had that thought. He was as surprised as many might be to learn he could get all of his care right here, at Sault Area Hospital. **While imaging scans, lab samples and medical records may have gone out of town for testing or review, <u>Gabe never did</u>.**

Gabe has been a long time supporter of Sault Area Hospital Foundation – serving as Chair of our Board of Directors from 2014-2017. But this past year was his first time experiencing Sault Area Hospital <u>as a patient</u>. In the enclosed letter, Gabe shares his story with you *<u>in his own words</u>* – highlighting what it meant to him and his family to have care here, in Sault Ste. Marie. We are so proud that the team at Sault Area Hospital is able to provide such outstanding care to patients like Gabe – but <u>they couldn't do it without the support of donors</u>!

You can help make more <u>outstanding care</u> possible, for patients like Gabe!

Gabe could get care here, at Sault Area Hospital, thanks to the incredible tools our care teams have access to. The advanced imaging equipment, laboratory tools, and surgical technology needed to care for him, and thousands of others each year, are at our hospital thanks to generous community donors.

But the needs never stop. The medical imaging department that reviews Gabe's results? They had to upgrade their <u>image storage system ("PACs")</u> this year, which lets them compare scans to watch for changes.

The laboratory that runs his critical tests? They need a <u>tissue processor</u> and <u>microscope</u> to review samples from biopsies – helping determine the type, grade and characteristics of cancer, to make a treatment plan.

Not to mention items used across every department of the hospital – like <u>hospital beds</u>, <u>patient monitors</u>, and <u>IV pumps</u> that constantly need replacement. All of this and more is <u>critically needed</u> to continue to deliver care, close to home. Your gifts make it possible for us to bring this equipment to Sault Area Hospital.

Would you give this holiday season to keep care close to home?

Every donation to Sault Area Hospital Foundation has a <u>direct impact</u> on the care our hospital can provide. Every piece of equipment you help to purchase ensures we can deliver the care our community needs, close to home. And there's no place like home – especially for the holidays.

Our entire community depends on this hospital. That includes thousands of people in the Algoma District – not just our neighbours, but our friends, our families and ourselves.

I hope you'll join together with us, in support of outstanding care at Sault Area Hospital.

Teresa Martone, Executive Director

P.S. Our "Tree of Hope" will be on display in our hospital lobby all holiday season. Even if you can't make a gift at this time, **please send back a message of hope for our patients and healthcare workers!** Just use the enclosed form and envelope...

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Gabe's Story: It all happened at SAH

Local Chartered Professional Accountant, **Gabe Stefanizzi**, is sharing his story so you can understand the profound impact local care has had on him and his family.

A year ago, I wasn't sure if I would be here this Christmas.

It started in late August of 2024. I was coming back from a family trip, and I had a terrible cough. At first, I thought it was just a summer cold – but it wouldn't go away.

In September, the body aches came. I decided to call my family doctor. Something didn't seem right. X-ray results came back with pneumonia, so I started medication... but it wasn't helping. My doctor requested a CT scan from Sault Area Hospital, and my original appointment was set for December 30th. When the cough got worse, my CT scan got bumped up to the end of October. It was the next day I got the news: **stage four lung cancer.**

I'm a non-smoker. I run regularly, and I've always lived a healthy, active lifestyle. I was shocked. How could I have lung cancer? But the symptoms added up – coughing, pain in my side, shortness of breath. It was all there. After that CT result, everything happened so quickly.

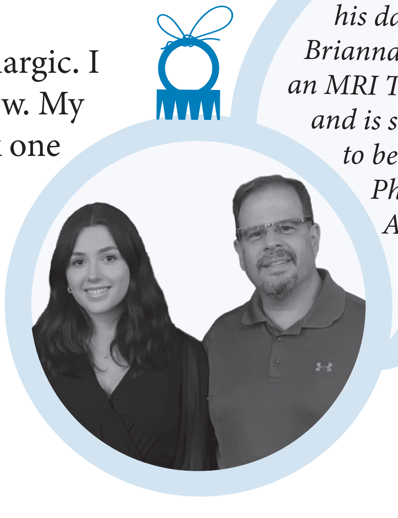
Dr. Kuntz, my family doctor, immediately connected me with the Chief of Surgery at Sault Area Hospital, Dr. Reich. A few days later, I met my Oncologist, Dr. Febbraro. When we met Dr. Febbraro at SAH, she gave us a grim picture: **if we couldn't find a treatment, I could be palliative in 6 months.** My world was upside down.

I spent an entire day in the hospital for the follow-up appointments. CTs, MRIs, biopsies... test after test. My daughter is an MRI Technologist at SAH, and she told me you need to stay still in the MRI, so they can get a clear image. I remember laying there with this cough, and the pain hurt so bad, but **I could hear my daughter in the back of my head saying, *"Dad, you can't move. Make sure you don't move."***

When the results came back we were shocked. **My lung had a 7.6-centimeter tumor on it**. The cancer had severely damaged bone in my left hip, and my right shoulder. They found it throughout my spine, on my liver, and in my skull. It was everywhere. After my first set of scans, Orthopedic surgeon, Dr. Costain, told me that I had to stay off my left leg and hip. I left with crutches, but I didn't understand the severity of everything that was happening.

I'm lucky to have a doctor in my family. My brother-in-law works at St. Joseph's Healthcare in Hamilton, and I asked if he could be part of my care team. Thanks to electronic records, they could share the test results with him. He was able to review my records and tests as they were being done.

I was put on some pretty heavy medication, and I was very lethargic. I hadn't slept in months, I wasn't eating, couldn't chew or swallow. My wife was concerned, so she reached out to her brother. He took one look at my most recent bloodwork and told her, **"You should get him checked into the hospital".** When I got to SAH, they told me I had a large pericardial effusion – fluid buildup around the heart. This became a medical emergency requiring immediate intervention in the cardiac cath lab. I ended up in the ICU for the weekend, then moved to 3C for almost three weeks where I underwent two radiation treatments.



Gabe and his daughter, Brianna. She is an MRI Technologist, and is studying to become a Physician Assistant!

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Given the extensive bone damage, I was required to remain in a wheelchair until my bones healed... they estimated 8 weeks. Between the physicians, the nurses, PSWs, even the caretaking staff... everyone had their job to do and it all seemed so seamless. It was while I was admitted that we got the good news. **Dr. Reich came into my room and said, "We found some hope. We found a marker."**

I was formally diagnosed with ALK Positive Lung Cancer – Stage IV – a very rare type of lung cancer which only occurs in 1-4% of lung cancer patients. **There's nobody in Northern Ontario, on record, that has had my type of cancer.** The closest person that has it is in the GTA area. It's caused by a gene mutation. The ALK (anaplastic lymphoma kinase) gene helps build your nervous system and digestive system at birth, then goes dormant. Mine didn't go dormant – it just sort of laid low. Then, when it mutates, it creates cancer cells. **It's a fluke. A fluke that I have it, a fluke that they found it. I was very fortunate.**

Cancer care has come a long way. I was placed on an oral therapy treatment drug. It's designed to help slow or stop tumor growth. It arrived quickly, and **I started treatment right away.**

I got home from the hospital on December 3rd, and at the time I was still very weak. I remember sitting in my kitchen, looking out the window and thought, "four months ago I went for a run and now I'm in a wheelchair". Christmas was quickly approaching.

We don't have a big family, but I love to cook. I always make Bacala for the holidays – it's a traditional Italian cod dish. It was hard to be sick during the holidays, but my wife took it upon herself to prepare the Bacala for the family. She took on so much to make sure that we didn't miss out. There's been so much support, and I'm so grateful for all of it.

My care team told me I should start to feel okay a few weeks after I started treatment, and true to their prediction I was off my pain medication by January 1st. By mid-January, I was doing more for myself. That's when I had my repeat scan, and it's funny... the Radiologist that reviewed my first scans, Dr. Jenkin, happened to review this one too. He made a comment in the scan, basically saying **"WOW, what did you give this guy?!"** The comparison was pretty amazing. The scans were showing the cancer was gone from my liver and skull. My bones were healing, and I was able to get out of the wheelchair. All because of the medication. **It was a miracle.**

I don't think I'll ever be completely free of cancer, but I'm starting to live my life again. I still come to SAH every month to see Dr. Febbraro, and every three months for scans. I've been working on physio, going to the gym, trying to get my strength back, and I'm trying to get back to running. I've pretty much resumed everything in my life that I've done before. I'm even planning on preparing the Bacala this Christmas!

There are so many things that you take for granted in life, when things are going great. Then as soon as they're not so great, you realize all the things around you – the family, friends, and people who are there for you. Sault Area Hospital was there for me when I needed them, too.

All my care has happened right here, at SAH. I could stay close with my family, and have visits. I thought about that through the whole process... What if I was in Sudbury or Toronto? How would I communicate with family? **There's no place like home** – especially when you're sick.

I never thought I would need it, but I'm glad **SAH has the equipment needed to care for people like me, because of what we do. You, me, and so many other donors who support this hospital.**

Thank you for making a difference with me, for me. Gabe Stefanizzi