

CRAIG'S COURT

PediDome space inspires young patients to 'never give up'

BY KATRINA BURTON

The legacy of the late sports reporter Craig Sager lives on at Craig's Court at MD Anderson Children's Cancer Hospital. A Dec. 14 ceremony dedicated the space at the Hoglund Foundation PediDome, where young patients can spend time playing basketball while undergoing cancer treatment.

The event coincided with the first anniversary of Sager's death. It preceded a Houston Rockets-San Antonio Spurs game, where \$80,000 was raised for the Sager Strong Foundation, which supports acute myeloid leukemia (AML) research at MD Anderson.

For 25 years, Sager covered sports for multiple media outlets including CNN, TBS and TNT. Best known for his role as a sideline reporter for the NBA and his collection of bright and colorfully garnished suits and jackets, Sager developed a passion for finding a cure for AML when he was diagnosed in 2014.

In July 2016, Sager accepted the Jimmy V Perseverance Award at ESPN's annual ESPYs awards show, vowing he would never give up. He shared his determination with some 2,000 supporters at MD Anderson's 75th anniversary celebration in November 2016. In December 2016, he was inducted into the Sports Broadcasting Hall of Fame.

Video: <http://bit.ly/2l80BBj>



Naveen Pemmaraju, M.D., addresses attendees at the dedication of Craig's Court at the Hoglund PediDome at MD Anderson Children's Cancer Hospital.

PHOTO BY ADOLFO CHAVEZ III



Sager's MD Anderson doctors Muzaffar Qazilbash, M.D., far left, and Naveen Pemmaraju, M.D., far right, celebrate the moment with Sager's children Riley and Ryan; his wife, Stacy; and Peter Pisters, M.D., president of MD Anderson.

SURVIVORS SAY

Esophageal cancer survivor Jesse Purdy, of Georgetown, Texas, was a psychology professor for nearly 40 years at Southwestern University. Last October, Purdy received the Cattlemen for Cancer Research Survivor Award, which honors courageous cancer fighters across Central Texas.

I first came to MD Anderson in August 2016. My physician, Dr. David Rice, carefully explained, in layman's terms, how he would remove the cancerous tissue in my esophagus and then pull up my stomach and attach it, along with part of my esophagus, to the other section. He told me about the risks and possible complications that could arise. Most important, he told me about the following blood work and CT scans, and that he would bring my case before a group of esophageal doctors. Once he had all the information, he would devise optimal treatment plans.

This approach gave me a great deal of confidence that I could, and would, be cured of cancer and that I could begin to plan for my retirement years.

A few weeks later, I received a call. The group had come to the consensus that my cancer could be eliminated by either surgery or endoscopic treatments. I chose the latter and Dr. Rice's team readily turned me over to another team. I realized that patients are truly the biggest concern for doctors at MD Anderson.

Unfortunately, the endoscopic treatment did not eradicate my cancer. I was again turned over to Dr. Rice. He spent days following the first operation trying to understand what might have caused my inability to swallow. Again, he told me that he planned to consult with colleagues before making a final decision. I cannot emphasize enough how his attitude impressed me and gave me confidence that I was receiving world-class treatment.

These discussions led to a second operation that determined

Dr. Rice had figured correctly — my stomach had somehow twisted, cutting off the blood supply and causing it to die along with a length of my lower esophagus. Dr. Rice removed my

stomach and most of my esophagus, and rerouted the remaining esophagus. A third operation in May reconstructed my digestive system. This 14-hour surgery required Dr. Rice and reconstructive surgeon Dr. Matthew Hanasono to connect the small intestine to the remaining esophagus and build a blood supply to keep the system and me alive for years to come.

Dr. Rice and his team personify what it means to be a hero whose actions, when surgeries do not go as planned, do not instill panic but rather lead to careful reflection and acquisition of more information that ultimately leads to actions that save patients' lives. It is precisely this scenario that I have experienced firsthand and that saved my life.



Jesse Purdy

Promise invites cancer survivors to share their reflections. Email promise@mdanderson.org.

PHOTO BY BEVERLY DAUGHTRY