

# HEALTHY LIVING

## Standing up to cancer

By Dave Ficere

Cancer. The very word strikes fear in the heart, quickens the pulse and raises a person's anxiety level.

One of those types of cancer is Myeloma, which begins in the bone marrow and affects the plasma cells. According to the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society, the most common form of the ailment is Multiple Myeloma, which affects several different areas of the body. It is found in more than 90 percent of people afflicted with Myeloma.

Here in the Grand Canyon State, the Arizona Myeloma Network (AZMN) conducts outreach events and education programs, with special consideration for the underserved African-American, Asian-Pacific, Hispanic American and Native American populations.

The driving force behind AZMN is Founder and President Barbara Kavanagh, a self-described educator, facilitator and patient advocate, who has been active for many years in charitable causes. She first got involved in the fight against Myeloma 23 years ago when her husband was diagnosed with the disease.

Kavanagh recently won the prestigious Arizona Business Magazine Healthcare Leadership Award in Community Outreach for her outstanding work with AZMN, but she didn't start out that way. "I have a hard time saying no," she says, and because she and her husband travelled a lot for his business, she wasn't able to work a regular job. So, she began volunteering her time to different organizations. "One thing led to another," she says, and the Arizona Myeloma Network began in 2004 after her husband retired and they settled here. The organization is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit charity that also conducts outreach events and education programs, as well as working with a number of key medical institutions here in the Valley.

This past March, AZMN hosted its 8th annual "Living with Myeloma" conference in Scottsdale. Experts from the Translational Genomics Research Institute (TGen), the Mayo Clinic and others participated in the free forum that was open to all patients, caregivers,

family, friends and health care professionals who wanted to learn more about the rare and often misdiagnosed bone marrow cancer.

"Our Myeloma conferences have become an important opportunity for patients and families to learn about this rare form of blood cancer and feel less alone," Kavanagh says. "Attendees get the best information available about cancer in general and Myeloma specifically, and they get to hear from the top specialists not only locally but also from around the country. They also learn about the latest treatments and research, get an opportunity to meet others, learn and be encouraged."

"We're so fortunate to have facilities like the Mayo Clinic and T-Gen in our backyards," Kavanagh says. "They're doing some wonderful work in educating cancer patients about research and keeping them informed."

Kavanagh defines the mission of the Arizona Myeloma Network as threefold: Education, Awareness and Advocacy, with the goal of improving treatment and quality of life for Myeloma patients, their families and caregivers. That includes providing the most up to date information on Myeloma through symposiums, workshops and meetings, all of which are open to the public and free of charge.

The organization sponsors a number of events throughout the year, including a golf tournament this fall to support their work. Prior to that is the 7th Annual AZMN/Navajo Nation Cancer Awareness and Advocacy Conference on Saturday, June 14 in Window Rock. Co-sponsored by the John Wayne Cancer Foundation in Newport Beach, California, the all day conference is free and open to the public and includes a raffle and entertainment. In addition to that conference, AZMN also offers periodic Cancer Caregivers Seminars throughout the year to assist caregivers.

To learn more about the Arizona Myeloma Network and what it has to offer, call them at (623) 388-6847, email [azMyeloma\\_network@cox.net](mailto:azMyeloma_network@cox.net) or visit their website.