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Impact

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THANKING THOSE WHO MAKE A DIFFERENCE



Woodruff Family establishes Institute's first chair in colorectal cancer research with \$2.5 million gift

Gretchen Woodruff, longtime supporter of Dana-Farber, recently made a gift of \$2.5 million to establish the Douglas Gray Woodruff Chair in Colorectal Cancer Research, the first chair in this area at Dana-Farber. The first incumbent is Jeffrey Meyerhardt, MD, MPH, clinical director of the Gastrointestinal Cancer Center and co-director of the Center for Colon and Rectal Cancer, whose work is bolstering the Institute's leadership in colorectal cancer research and care. Gretchen and her family made this generous contribution in memory of her late husband, Douglas Woodruff, who was treated for colon cancer at Dana-Farber in 1998. "Our first day at Dana-Farber, I was struck by how happy, upbeat, and positive everybody was," Gretchen recalled. "We just had an amazing experience."

For nearly 20 years, Gretchen and her family have honored her late husband's battle by cultivating a tradition of giving back. Her parents, Marge and Bill Congleton, started the Douglas Gray Woodruff Fund at Dana-Farber in 1998, and Gretchen's family continues to build on this legacy through charitable giving and community engagement. Gretchen is a member of Dana-Farber's Visiting Committee for Gastrointestinal Oncology and has participated in the Boston Marathon® Jimmy Fund Walk presented by Hyundai for the past 10 years. Her son, Ben, recently rode in the Pan-Mass Challenge (PMC), starting a team in his father's

memory. "Ben has always looked for a way to make a difference and he's found it," said Gretchen. Her daughter, Meggie, recently accepted a position as a nurse practitioner on Penn Medicine's oncology floor. She will be riding alongside her brother in the PMC this year.

The Woodruff Family's most recent gift will enable extraordinary investigators such as Meyerhardt to build upon their landmark advances in colon and rectal cancer research. Throughout his career, Meyerhardt has led critical investigations that propelled national clinical trials and novel treatment approaches. His research assesses how factors such as diet, physical activity, vitamin D levels, and weight change influence patient outcomes and survivorship. He also assisted in the development of Dana-Farber's gastrointestinal tumor bank and clinical repository, which have been invaluable resources for the entire gastrointestinal cancer team. Support from this Dana-Farber chair will enable Meyerhardt to further his clinical practice and research.

"I am so grateful for Gretchen's support, which comes at an opportune time in colorectal cancer research," said Meyerhardt. "It will permit us to gain a richer understanding of this complex disease, to explore new treatment approaches and, ultimately, to pinpoint prevention strategies that could forestall the disease altogether."

Most of all, Gretchen's contribution is an effort to save future generations from



Jeffrey Meyerhardt, MD, MPH, is the first incumbent of the Douglas Gray Woodruff Chair in Colorectal Cancer Research at Dana-Farber, established by Gretchen Woodruff and her family in memory of her husband.

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— **GRETCHEN WOODRUFF** and an Institute Trustee

the hardships of gastrointestinal cancers. As she put it, "We hope that helping to fund this research will prevent others from going through what we did." ■