

CancerBlast concert raises more than \$50,000 for cancer research

The Songs for Hope Society has used the power of music to inspire philanthropy and boost local cancer research to the tune of \$53,550.

The society's CancerBlast concert, held last April, brought together trumpet virtuoso Jens Lindemann and local musicians for a one-of-a-kind event to raise money for the cancer research being conducted at the University of Lethbridge by Drs. Bryan Kolb (neuroscience) and Olga Kovalchuk (biological sciences).

Their Cancer, Chemotherapy and the Brain project is examining why radiation treatments affect memory, balance and other behaviours. "Chemo brain" affects up to 75 per cent of cancer patients and U of L researchers are working on novel strategies to prevent and mitigate chemo brain to give cancer patients a better quality of life.

Society members, including Don Robb, Ken Lewis, René van de Vendel, Karly Lewis, Tania Stilson and Cyndi Vos, were pleased to provide funding to help with the research project.

"Many of my friends and family members have suffered with cancer and research was something I knew nothing about," says van de Vendel. "This concert really tied it together and made me realize there was something we could do and something we can hope for."

"It's a magnificent feeling," Robb says about making the donation. "It was a great way to bring the musical community, the University community and the cancer community together."

"I would like to acknowledge all the brass musicians who stepped up and gratuitously participated in this fundraiser," says Lewis. "This was a grassroots initiative by a small core of people and it really caught on. Everybody thought this was a great project and worked very hard to pull it all off."

Kovalchuk says the funding allows her and the other researchers involved in the project to keep working on their research at a crucial time.

"This donation means we can continue our momentum and finish important experiments, analyze results and publish papers," says Kovalchuk. "Cancer is turning into a chronic disease and the key thing is to make sure cancer survivors live their lives to the fullest."

In an economic environment where there is more competition for fewer research dollars, donations from the local community become increasingly important.

“I lost my dad to cancer a year ago,” says Kovalchuk. “The concert gave us a moment to remember him and others who were lost to the disease. That was very important, as well as the sense of community working together and trying to build something together.”

“One of our founding organizers, Scott Reiter, was afflicted with cancer and he passed away just weeks before this event and he was on board,” says Lewis. “That became kind of a calling card for all musicians because everybody knew him.”

The investment is part of the U of L’s SHINE campaign and this partnership highlights the importance of the U of L’s connection to the community, specifically how expertise available at the University helps solve problems at the local level and beyond and leads to opportunities for economic growth and a more sustainable future.