Donna Jaeger helps keep her husband's legacy alive

Written by Kalyn Freud For the Enquirer
May. 12

If you go

What: Third annual Marshall W. Jaeger Memorial Golf Outing
When: July 20, starting at 8 a.m.
Where: Riverside Golf Course, 245 E. Columbia Ave.
Details: $65 per person (lunch included). For more information, contact Donna Jaeger at 269-420-5890

Marshall Jaeger is remembered as a man always eager to help those around him. And thanks to his wife, Donna, three years after Marshall died from cancer, many other people are still being impacted by his legacy.

A lifelong resident of Battle Creek, Marshall Jaeger attended Lakeview High School, left the area to serve in the Vietnam War, then returned and married his sweetheart Donna.

Together they built a life, with Donna working for the Department of Veterans Affairs and Marshall working for Grand Trunk/CN Railroad as a signal maintainer for more than 30 years.

Donna remembers her husband of nearly 40 years as a man who loved his life, loved those around him, and enjoyed the simple pleasures life offered him.

“Marshall’s always been a golfer,” she said. “He loved golf. He loved fishing. And he loved his job.”

When her husband was diagnosed with throat cancer in 2007, it hit the family hard. The Jaegers went to the University of Michigan for Marshall’s treatment. The care of the doctors and staff at the University of Michigan is something Donna still remembers.

“They were so good to us at U of M,” she said. “They’re like my family now. Above and beyond.”

Marshall fought the disease but finally succumbed to it in June 2010.

The story could have ended there, but Donna was not going to let that happen. She pushed forward, looking for ways to honor her late husband.

“My daughter and I talked and we said, ‘We need to do a golf outing every year in his memory and the proceeds need to go to head and neck cancer research.’ Now the doctors come down and golf and a couple of the staff members. It’s quite an ordeal.”

After the first Marshall W Jaeger Memorial Golf Outing Donna presented the Michigan staff with the proceeds and the staff was thrilled stating, “every single penny” counts.

Donna Jaeger is not simply doing a golf outing every year, but has a specific goal in mind with her task. Over the course of five years, starting with the first golf outing, she would like to raise a total of $10,000 for Head and Neck Cancer Research. To top off the fundraising goal, the Jaeger’s daughter, Nicole, is planning a cross-country bike trip.

Nicole Jaeger lives in San Diego, where she is also studying to get her doctorate in Physical Therapy. Once she has achieved her degree, which is still a couple of years away, Nicole plans to ride her bike from San Diego to Michigan.
and all the proceeds from that ride will be the Jaeger’s finale of fundraising.

Nicole was able to come home during the months her father battled the disease and witnessed him being assisted by the physical therapist. The idea to pursue a career in the field was sparked.

She was also encouraged by her father to pursue her doctorate in Physical Therapy.

“Marshall couldn’t talk because of all the surgeries on him,” Donna said. “But he wrote down, ‘You should do that.’”

The third annual outing is set for July 20 at Riverside Golf Course and Donna is excited for what this year’s event will bring to the head and neck cancer research.

“I’d just like people to participate because we get none of the money, it all goes to the U of M,” she said.

She said she is thrilled to have her husband’s memory honored not only at the annual Memorial Golf Outing in Battle Creek, but she also had the privilege of participating in Washington D.C.’s “In Memory Day” where Marshall was honored for his 1966-67 Vietnam service.

And in another more personal way, Donna Jaeger has honored Marshall, “He always talked about buying another Corvette, because when we met he had a Corvette. He always said, ’when I retire I’m going to buy another Corvette. And I said, ‘Marshall get one now,’ and he always said, ‘no, no, no, I’m going to wait until I retire.’”

Marshall never got the chance to realize his dream of buying another Corvette.

“So you know what I did?” Donna Jaeger said with a smile. “I went out and bought one. I know he would want me to have it.”