

# volunteerprofile

## “To whom much is given, much is required”



Dr. Alice Garrett with her daughter Dr. Chaunte Garrett and Bobby's oncologist Dr. Neil Hayes at the 5th Annual Bobby F. Garrett Esophageal Cancer Benefit Concert

Five years ago, Dr. Alice Garrett lost the love of her life to cancer. Her husband Bobby was first diagnosed with a rare form of larynx cancer in 1997.

“The doctors said his cancer was the size of a ballpoint pen and had been dormant for 25 years,” remembered Alice.

Bobby was no stranger to adversity. He was once hit by a car and paralyzed from the waist down. The doctors told him he would never walk again, but Bobby had something else in mind. After countless hours of rehabilitation, Bobby not only regained use of his legs, but also took a route for his job with the post office that required him to walk 11 miles every day.

Attacking his cancer with the same trademark determination, Bobby battled valiantly with the disease for more than a decade—always with Alice by his side. “Bobby was a man of astronomical faith,” said Alice. “He would say: ‘I’m going to stay with you all just as long as I can.’”

Both Bobby and Alice leaned heavily on the doctors and staff at UNC Lineberger. “We were so grateful for their warmth. They were the kind of people you wanted taking care of you,” said Alice.

The Garretts developed an especially close bond with Bobby’s oncologist, Dr. Neil Hayes. “Faith takes you through everything, and we always had complete faith in Dr. Hayes. He was always so sincere and honest, and we marveled at the way he was

able to relay really difficult information for us to hear.”

In December of 2008, Bobby lost his battle with cancer. Although the grief was at times overwhelming, Alice had a deep faith and strong support system. “After he passed, I was in such a state,” she said. “A counselor recommended I find a project or do something to take my mind off the grief.”

With the encouragement and help of her daughter Chaunte, Alice began planning a benefit concert in Bobby’s memory. She received an outpouring of support from family and friends, and her reverend offered to host the concert at St. Matthew AME Church in Raleigh.

“I wanted to do something true to Bobby and raise money so I can give back to the kind of treatments we received. Only through research and prayer are we going to do anything about this disease that is devastating so many families,” said Alice. “We invited groups that were meaningful to Bobby—people that knew him well and would love to be a part of it.”

This year marked the 5th Annual Bobby F. Garrett Esophageal Cancer Benefit Concert, which has raised a total of \$40,000 for head and neck cancer research at UNC Lineberger.

Dr. Hayes is one of the concert’s most ardent supporters and devoted attendees. His relationship with Alice and her family has only grown stronger in the years since Bobby’s death. “Dr. Hayes has meant everything to us,” said Alice. “He’s just part of the family now.”

In addition to raising funds, Alice works to promote cancer awareness through a variety of advocacy efforts throughout the year. She has shared her family’s patient experience with the UNC Lineberger Board of Visitors, distributed literature on cancer prevention in her community and taken her concert on the road, traveling to churches in Duplin County where she grew up and Bobby’s hometown in Laurens, SC.

To this day, Alice cannot speak of Bobby without tears welling up in her eyes. While the deep love and intense longing for her husband remains, volunteering has helped her to cope with the loss.

“My work with Lineberger is one of the most important things in my life. Bobby was always giving, and I feel the need to help—to know that it’s going to help some family or person in some way.”



Bobby and Alice Garrett

## Jeffrey and Margaret Dean — Fighting Cancer with all the Right Tools

When Margaret Dean first contacted UNC Lineberger in December to make a gift, she had done her homework. An employee with Quintiles, Margaret shared that she and her husband Jeffrey wished to contribute to triple negative breast cancer research, and they had come to learn Lineberger is a global leader in this area. What inspired this young couple with two small children to act was Margaret’s mother and her experience with the disease. For the Deans, choosing Lineberger with science savvy leaders like Drs. Lisa Carey and Chuck Perou, was an easy decision.

At first, the Deans were not certain how they were going to structure their gift, but when they learned that an expendable fund would help provide much needed cash to speed up research efforts, they decided that was the way to go. They were delighted to discover they could name the fund for Margaret’s mother who was treated in the northeast.

The Deans are already thinking creatively about how they can grow the The Elizabeth Whittet O’Conor Fund for Breast Cancer Research in years to come. They

plan to ask friends to contribute and have initiated steps to secure matching funds from their respective employers. During a visit to the cancer hospital Margaret remarked, “We want to teach our two boys about philanthropy and about the real world impact of science. We also want to help enable others to learn more about the success and challenges in cancer research. One opportunity we see is for our children’s birthdays to invite guests to contribute in lieu of gifts.”

Margaret further reflects, “Sometimes people think breast cancer is not as bad as it used to be. That might be true for the majority of breast cancers, but breast cancer is not one disease, it is many diseases. Triple negative breast cancer affects a huge swath of women in the prime of their lives for whom there are no targeted therapies available. My mom’s treatment, through a clinical trial, turned out to be beneficial and she is doing great almost 10 years later. For us this is wonderful, but the why and opportunity to positively impact many others still remains.”

Jeffrey adds, “We need more tools in this fight. There



Jeffrey and Margaret Dean

is still so much to learn. My aunt, Peggy Heath Kravitz, passed away in 2009 after being diagnosed with a fairly common and treatable breast cancer case. We know that our investment is helping find answers that will enable consistent and positive outcomes. That’s why our family will continue to find ways to support UNC Lineberger’s research in years to come.”