

# Momentum

The Newsletter of

 **MemorialCare**  
Saddleback Medical Center Foundation

## Early Diagnosis During Pandemic: Philanthropy Makes It Possible

A global pandemic didn't stop Sydelle Lepoff of Mission Viejo from scheduling her annual mammogram back in October of 2020. Both of her parents passed away from cancer, so she never misses this appointment.

She is so grateful she scheduled that appointment — the radiologist at MemorialCare Breast Center at Saddleback Medical Center discovered a troublesome spot. The results of the biopsy showed a small invasive ductal carcinoma, what she had feared ... *cancer*.

Sydelle, age 74, knows how lucky she is that she came to Saddleback to have a 3D mammogram, purchased with the help of philanthropic donations from the community.

**"A regular 2D mammogram wouldn't have caught this," she said.**

She's also fortunate because all the radiologists at the Breast Center at Saddleback Medical Center are fellowship-trained and focus only on reading breast images. Nicole Lewis, M.D., read Sydelle's mammogram and detected her small tumor. Sydelle was then connected to our highly



Sydelle Lepoff, grateful breast cancer survivor, of Mission Viejo

experienced breast cancer navigator, Jackie Hower, who compassionately guides patients through each stage of their treatment plan and recovery.

"Jackie helped me not be afraid," said Sydelle. Sydelle was referred to Nora Evans, M.D., one of Saddleback Medical Center's esteemed surgeons, who recommended a lumpectomy. It was scheduled for December, two months from the day of her diagnosis.

"I was a nervous wreck, but Dr. Evans really calmed me," said Sydelle.

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Christy Ward, President,  
Saddleback Medical  
Center Foundation

## Thank You, Donors: The Best Is Yet to Come

Fall is a favorite time of the year for many, whether they enjoy pumpkin-spiced products, cooler days, or the approach of the holiday season. For me, I love fall because it is the season of gratitude.

At Saddleback Medical Center Foundation, we have much to be thankful for, and it starts with you, our donors! Whether you've given one time, given faithfully each year, or even remembered us in your estate plans or as an IRA beneficiary, please know how much we appreciate your support of our nonprofit hospital.

Philanthropy strengthens Saddleback's ability to provide exceptional care with leading-edge technology, Magnet-recognized nursing (achieved by only 9% of U.S. hospitals), patient-focused community education, and vaccination events — all designed to improve the health and well-being of our communities. Our high level of personalized care is not attainable with insurance reimbursements alone — our community steps up to ensure we have the best care close to home.

Looking ahead, it's exciting to share upcoming projects and programs that donors can support, including our Women's Health Pavilion and Breast Center, beautiful renovations of our Women's Hospital birthing suites, and expanded patient navigation in our cancer, cardiac and 55+ programs.

We're grateful for you, and we hope you'll remember Saddleback in this season of gratitude through year-end giving and long-term and estate charitable plans.

*Christy Ward*

## At 'Heart' of Treatment Journey Is Warm, Personal Touch

Imagine you are about to undergo a cardiac procedure and feeling a little nervous. When you check in, a friendly face comes over to review what will happen during the procedure and listen to your fears and expectations. After it's over, she visits to see how you are feeling, reviews what the physician did, and go over your medications and discharge instructions.

"I also call all the patients the next day and go over the medications again," said Courtney Harris, R.N., cardiac nurse navigator at Saddleback Medical Center who serves patients undergoing interventional cardiology or electrocardiac procedures, such as ablations or defibrillator implants.

A new position funded by philanthropic dollars, the cardiac nurse navigator adds an extra level of care and service that patients want during their healthcare journey.

Courtney also helps these patients post-procedure through the **Red Bracelet Program, unique to MemorialCare.**

When patients are discharged, they receive a red bracelet to wear for 30 days. A phone number on the bracelet connects



Courtney Harris, R.N., Saddleback Medical Center's first Cardiac Nurse Navigator, a role funded by philanthropy

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***"This is the nicest hospital I've ever worked at. What patients tell me every day is they know the people treating them really care about them, and they feel it."***

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directly to Courtney, who will answer the phone 24/7 for patients who have questions or are feeling symptoms.

"Patients appreciate that when they call, they will get a live person who answers," said Courtney. **If you are interested in supporting the navigator program, call the Foundation at (949) 452-3724.**



Gina Romano Hernandez, R.N.,  
an ICU nurse educator who  
became a cardiac patient

## 'Grace' of Women's Giving Circle Empowers Cardiac Program

As a longtime nurse, Gina Romano Hernandez was used to taking care of others.

It was quite a shock when, in April of 2020, just as the pandemic was starting, she suddenly became a cardiac patient at her own hospital, Saddleback Medical Center.

Hernandez told her dramatic story at the annual member appreciation luncheon of Beauty In Grace, Saddleback Medical Center Foundation's women's giving circle. The event was held Aug. 3, 2021, at Montage Laguna Beach.

Gina recalls that staff had been establishing new safety protocols for the COVID-19 surge, when she began to feel pressure on her chest and numbing down her arms.

She didn't know at the time that she was having a heart attack caused by a tear in her artery. She was rushed to the cardiac catheterization (cath) lab to have a stent placed, saving her life.

Because of her ordeal, Gina was especially grateful that this year's Beauty In Grace membership gifts were supporting Saddleback's cath lab renovation, providing the newest equipment and technology to treat cardiac and stroke patients. Cardiovascular disease is the No. 1 killer of women, causing 1 in 3 deaths each year, according to the American Heart Association.

Each year, Beauty In Grace pools its \$1,000 membership gifts to support a health service related to women at Saddleback Medical Center. This year, the group had 75 members.



Beauty In Grace memberships are benefiting a renovation of Saddleback's cardiac catheterization lab, where heart attacks and strokes are often treated.

To find out more about Beauty In Grace, visit [memorialcare.org/BeautyInGrace](https://memorialcare.org/BeautyInGrace).



Jessica Sanders

## Ready to Serve: New Senior Advocate

Saddleback Medical Center is expanding how we serve seniors with Senior Program Liaison Jessica Sanders, a role funded by philanthropic dollars that will support the new **MemorialCare 55+** program.

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*"I'm an advocate for seniors at our hospital. We want them to know they can rely on us for their unique needs."*

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Jessica provides free support to seniors **during Medicare open enrollment**, connects with senior communities about services offered by Saddleback Medical Center, and supports the **free MemorialCare 55+** enrichment program.

Adults 55 and older who sign up for the program will receive a membership card and benefits:

- 20% discount at our medical center cafés, gift shops, and pharmacies (on over-the-counter products)
- Free non-emergency transportation to and from appointments, within 7 miles of Saddleback Medical Center

To contact Jessica or sign up for MemorialCare 55+, call (949) 452-3791 or visit [memorialcare.org/55plus](https://memorialcare.org/55plus).



**AT-A-GLANCE:  
2021  
FOUNDATION  
SCHOLARSHIP  
AWARDS**

**WHAT**

Saddleback Medical Center Foundation's 44th annual Scholarship Program Awards

**AWARDS**

\$32,000 awarded to 17 employees this year

**HISTORY**

\$1,195,290 awarded since the program's inception, funded by donors

**APPLICANTS**

Nurses and staff pursuing bachelor's, master's or doctorate degrees to further their education

**IMPACT**

Nurses and staff gain expertise to provide better patient care

**SIGNIFICANCE**

More nurse degrees helps Saddleback Medical Center maintain Magnet status, the highest recognition of nursing excellence, shown to correlate to better patient outcomes. This status is held by only 9% of hospitals nationwide.

**GIVE**

Make a difference! Contribute to our scholarship fund with a tax-deductible gift. Call (949) 452-3724 or visit [memorialcare.org/giveSB](https://memorialcare.org/giveSB).

# Estate Bequest: A Gift That Needs No Bow

Back in 2014, Ann Romano of Capistrano Beach felt a lump in her left breast. She went for a mammogram at MemorialCare Breast Center in Laguna Hills, and after a biopsy, the diagnosis was early-stage breast cancer.



Ann Romano, our new Heritage Society member

"After undergoing a lumpectomy, I had 'warp-speed radiation,' where you go twice a day for five days," said Ann. When she reached her five-year anniversary of being cancer-free, the staff at the MemorialCare Cancer Institute celebrated with her. She knew she wanted to say thank you in a special way.

"My husband was also cared for at Saddleback several times for congestive heart failure," said Ann. "The people were so dedicated and caring."

Ann has designated a percentage of her estate to Saddleback Medical Center with a bequest. This type of gift will impact care for patients and makes Ann a member of our Heritage Society.

"I want people who go through what I went through to have a first-rate experience, too." **The Foundation can provide sample language for creating a bequest in your estate plans. For information, call (949) 452-3724.**

**CANCER**, from p. 1

On the day of her surgery, she recalls the white hazmat-like suits of every person in the operating room, taking extra safety precautions because of COVID-19. Dr. Evans finished in about 30 minutes, and today Sydelle doesn't even have a scar and feels wonderful.

Sydelle's radiation oncologist told her before Christmas that she wouldn't need radiation, and her oncologist, Sarah Hassan, M.D., also confirmed she would not need chemotherapy. What a gift!

**Philanthropic gifts have made a major impact on cancer services; community donations helped renovate and relocate the MemorialCare Cancer Institute and Damsker Family Pavilion to its current location in 2016.**

"I want to remind women to get those mammograms," said Sydelle. "Cancer doesn't care, so you've got to take care of yourself."



## Forward-Thinking Breast Care Will Get Modern New Home

Next year, Saddleback Medical Center will break ground on a modern new **Women's Health Pavilion**, where the MemorialCare Breast Center in Laguna Hills will be relocated on the first floor.

Patients will be able to conveniently access the most advanced breast care services in a stunning, state-of-the-art facility. We are looking to partner with generous supporters to help us build on our reputation of exceptional screening, diagnosis and treatment of breast cancer. For information on ways to support this project, please call (949) 452-3724.