

Grateful donors help fund innovation

By David Israelson



Everything is “so far, so good” a dozen years after his heart transplant at Toronto’s Peter Munk Cardiac Centre (PMCC), says Frank Lavorato. And that’s an understatement.

“I couldn’t be happier with the way I’ve been treated,” says Mr. Lavorato, a 65-year-old Woodbridge, Ont., resident whose family has a history of cardiac disease. Jeff Rubenstein thinks it’s wonderful that Mr. Lavorato’s transplant in 2003 was successful, but his goal is more expansive – less surgery, more non-invasive treatment and ever better knowledge, care and understanding of the heart.

Mr. Rubenstein is a Toronto businessman whose father, now 95, also had his life saved at the centre.

“He was 65 years old and had a heart attack right in the middle of a stress test. He had a quadruple bypass, and the doctor saved him. Our family has always been philanthropic. When someone saves your life, you want to become a bit more involved, say, “Thank you,” he says.

Mr. Rubenstein’s own heart skips a beat when he talks about the importance of supporting the centre’s work, if only from enthusiasm and excitement.

“There’s a saying, ‘Saving one life is like saving the world,’” notes Mr. Rubenstein, CEO of Export Packers Company Limited in Brampton, Ont. After his father was helped, Mr. Rubenstein was given a tour of the centre’s facilities, and “I felt compelled to do something,” he says.

Now it’s practically impossible to get Mr. Rubenstein to stop advocating for the Peter Munk Cardiac Centre, for the new related Ted Rogers Centre for Heart Research and for the work they’re doing to treat patients today and to develop new treatments for tomorrow.

“Cardiac care has come a long way in the last 25 years. We’ve made a lot of inroads in cardiac surgery, cardiology,” says Mr. Rubenstein, who is on the board of the Toronto General & Western Hospital Foundation. He is the Board Champion for the Peter Munk Cardiac Centre

and is leading its four-year campaign to raise \$100-million for the centre, which treats 55,000 patients a year with cardiac or vascular disease. This goal was achieved in October 2014, capping in at \$139-million.

The foundation is considering whether to launch another mega-campaign for the centre. Regardless, the need for funding is always there, says Linda Goldsack, Chair of the Peter Munk Cardiac Centre Campaign.

The foundation and PMCC work in “gift teams,” so that donors can apply their funds either to general hospital programs or specific areas such as heart research and cardiac care.

This enables people whose family members have been treated by PMCC to make specific gifts, and it also lets the world-leading heart experts who work there seek funding for new types of treatment, which are often still experimental and, therefore, wouldn’t be funded by government.

In an additional role, Mr. Rubenstein sits on the Peter

Jeff Rubenstein (right) and his father, Max, who has been a patient at the Peter Munk Cardiac Centre.

Munk Cardiac Centre Innovation Committee with medical experts, which evaluates research proposals to determine which ones are most ready to be funded. “It’s like going back to school for me. I learn so much all the time,” he jokes.

People in the Greater Toronto Area have a strong understanding of the importance of being generous toward state-of-the-art facilities like the Peter Munk Cardiac Centre and the Ted Rogers Centre for Heart Research, Ms. Goldsack says.

“Philanthropy is what allows this institution to take that next step,” she explains. “It allows for the establishment of academic chairs [for medical research]. We have 24 at the Peter Munk Cardiac Centre, all funded through philanthropy.”

Each chair requires about \$3-million in funding, Ms. Goldsack says. ▽

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