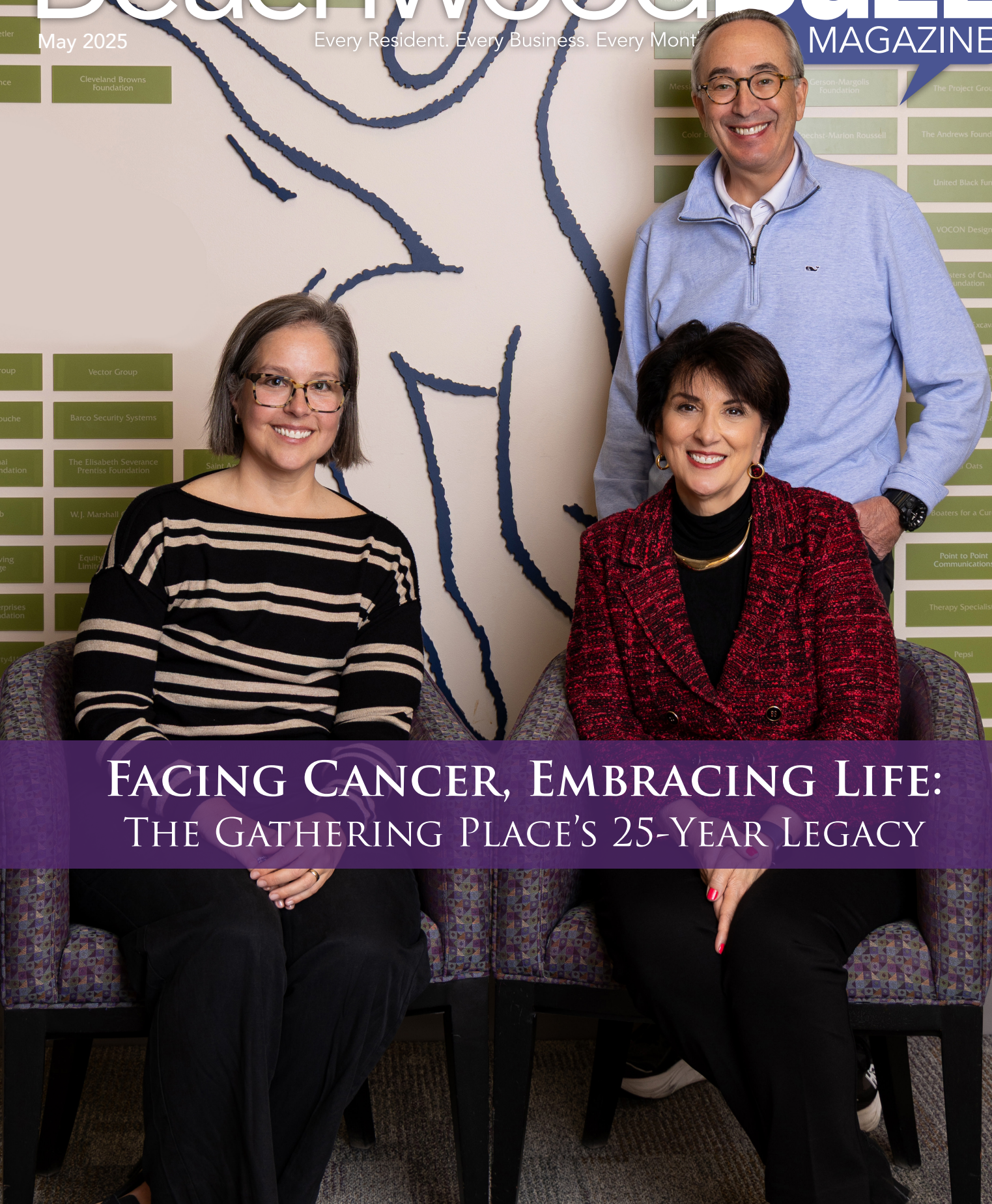


Beachwood Buzz

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Every Resident. Every Business. Every Month

MAGAZINE



FACING CANCER, EMBRACING LIFE:
THE GATHERING PLACE'S 25-YEAR LEGACY



FACING CANCER, EMBRACING LIFE: THE GATHERING PLACE'S 25-YEAR LEGACY

By Debby Zelman Rapoport

From left: The Gathering Place founder and former CEO Eileen Saffran, founding board member Margo Roth, former chief program officer Ellen Heyman, and current CEO Michele Seyranian.

As The Gathering Place celebrates its 25th anniversary, it honors the legacy of its founders and looks to the future, while reaffirming its mission: to support, educate, and empower individuals and families navigating the challenges of cancer – with compassion, dignity, and unwavering care.

At the helm of The Gathering Place is Michele Seyranian, CEO, whose connection to The Gathering Place began in 1999, after her 4-year-old daughter, Alique, was diagnosed with cancer. The compassionate support they received – including guidance toward a clinical trial that ultimately saved Alique's life – left a profound impact. What began as gratitude soon grew into a deep and lasting commitment to the organization – never with the thought of becoming its CEO.

When invited to lead TGP, Seyranian embraced the opportunity with enthusiasm. "Anyone who has walked through our doors understands the critical role TGP plays in supporting people on their cancer journey, just as it did for my family in 1999," she said. "To this day, I thank Eileen Saffran and Ellen Heyman, founders of TGP, for their vision and leadership," said Seyranian. "They provided support before their doors were even open."

Only after seven weeks in the job, the world changed as COVID forced the world to shut its doors. Seyranian knew that, more than ever, cancer patients and their families would need the support TGP could provide. Over the course of a weekend, TGP staff worked to convert their programs into virtual offerings.

"Our whole premise is based on hope, belief, and perseverance, one step at a time," Seyranian said. "We went virtual because we wanted to make sure people had access to our programs, ensuring their needs were being met."

"Today, we continue to meet people where they are by offering programming in person and online, she added. "We want people to know that when they take the first step and walk through our doors or visit our website, they will find support and comfort in a community that genuinely understands what they are experiencing."

"For 25 years, The Gathering Place has been a source of hope, healing, and strength for individuals and families facing the challenges of cancer," said Mayor Justin Berns. "TGP's commitment to providing free support, education, and empowerment has made a difference in countless lives across our community. We are proud to have such a compassionate organization in Beachwood and we celebrate this milestone with deep admiration."

The Gathering Place is kicking off its 25th anniversary with a celebration on June 1, right after Race for the Place. Race registration opens at 7:30 a.m., and participants are encouraged to stay after the awards ceremony for a lively celebration featuring food trucks, live music, games, and plenty of fun for all ages.

"We hope you'll join us for the whole morning of community, connection, and celebration," Seyranian said. *(Find full details on page 11.)*

Serving the Community with Kindness, Care, and Support

East and West Locations

To enhance accessibility for the community, TGP opened its second location in 2008. TGP West, in Westlake, ensures that individuals on Cleveland's Westside could more easily access the organization's resources.

Programming

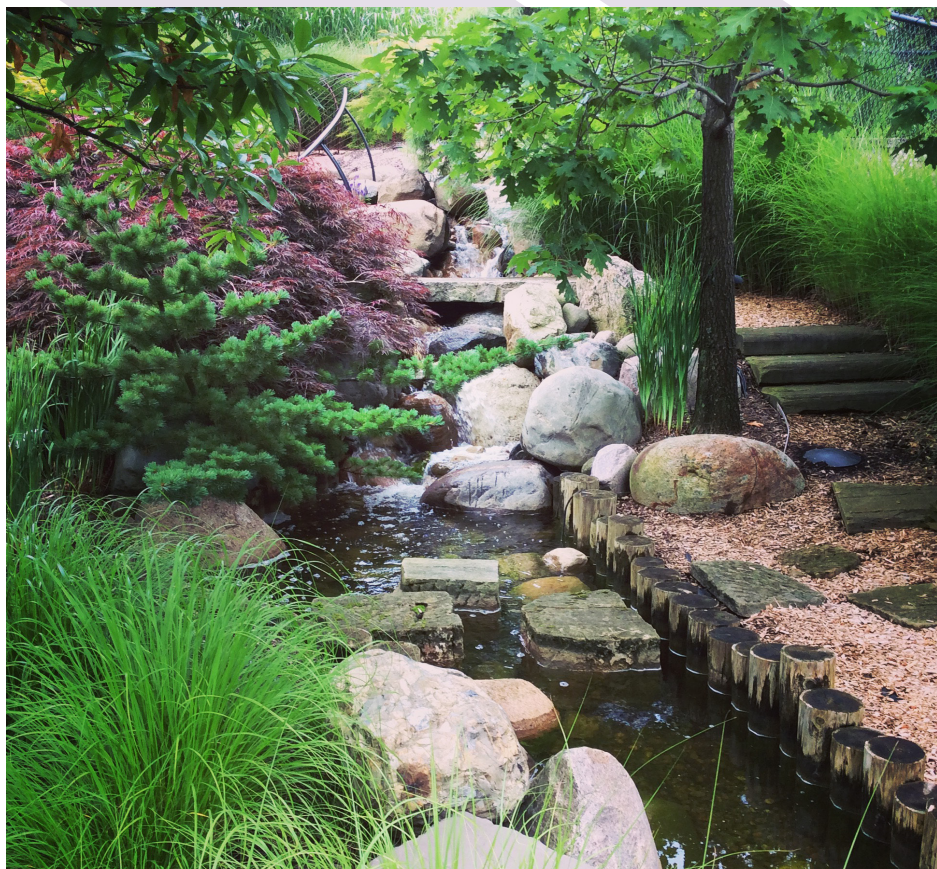
TGP offers programming for children, teens, adults, and families; summer camp for children ages 6-10; reiki and healing arts to support emotional and physical wellness; educational workshops on navigating treatment, survivorship, and side-effect management; and grief support groups – all free of charge!

Exercise and Nutrition

Exercise and nutrition programs are designed to educate and empower individuals as they adopt new habits that support their well-being.

Whether meeting one-on-one with a registered dietitian or joining a cooking class, TGP helps participants recognize that food is medicine and educates them about healthier eating habits with balanced, nutritious meals they'll enjoy.

Exercise is equally important. The Richman Family Wellness Center, located on Commerce Park Drive, was created to give participants access to a variety of fitness machines and equipment to support physical activity and recovery. Additionally, TGP offers dragon boating, yoga, tai chi, Zumba, and chair fitness programs, just to name a few.



The Ambiance

The walls of TGP Beachwood, which feature an inspiring art gallery, are thoughtfully designed to create a welcoming atmosphere for guests, even before they need services. One of the most poignant pieces on display is a collection of canvases created by participants, which includes a powerful quote by a cancer survivor bearing the words: "The hospital

saved my life. The Gathering Place saved my soul."

Beyond the interior, TGP's stunning garden (pictured) offers a tranquil space for beauty, reflection, and programming. Designed by the acclaimed landscape architect Virginia Burt, this peaceful oasis is open to the community. Visitors are invited to enjoy the serenity of the garden; just call to let TGP know you'll be stopping by.

TGP Since 2000 By the Numbers

55,000
INDIVIDUALS

who have made more than

400,000
VISITS

Programs are able to remain free of charge, thanks to the generosity of the community.
To become a supporter, visit www.touchedbycancer/donate.

\$50,000,000+
RAISED

Participants have come from all 50 states, plus Puerto Rico, D.C., and five countries since TGP began offering online programming.

7,100+
INSPIRED
to practice wellness
through physical activity

1,000+
CHILDREN
connected through children,
teen, and family programs

One Woman's Vision: A Lasting Legacy

In July 1998, Eileen Saffran founded The Gathering Place, a Beachwood-based nonprofit cancer support center that provides free programs and services for individuals and families affected by cancer. With 22 years' experience as a licensed social worker who worked in private and corporate settings – and having supported both of her parents, Anita and Lou Spandorf, through cancer diagnoses within a six-month span – Saffran was inspired by both personal and professional experiences to create this community haven. Focused on non-medical services that nurture the mind, body, and spirit, The Gathering Place became a reality when its doors opened in January 2000, turning Saffran's vision into a life-changing support system for countless families.

Ellen Heyman, chief program officer, worked side by side with Eileen from the very beginning. The two were introduced by the then-CEO of The Wellness Community, a national organization offering cancer support through affiliates across the country. That introduction sparked a partnership that would last more than two decades, with Heyman leading the development of programs designed to support individuals facing the emotional, physical, and social challenges of a cancer diagnosis.

Before joining TGP, Heyman worked as an advanced practice psychiatric mental health nurse in a medical-surgical setting, where she honed the skills required to navigate complex patient situations. Her experience revealed a troubling gap: The emotional and psychosocial needs of cancer patients were too often overlooked. Motivated to bridge that gap, she had already begun creating and implementing cancer support groups – laying the groundwork for the impactful programming she would later bring to TGP.

Together, through a true grassroots effort, Saffran and Heyman assembled a team of professionals, board of directors, donors, and volunteers, fully recognizing that it would be a team effort to build a strong foundation on which to support those whose lives have been touched by cancer.

"In the beginning, we offered a few select evidence-based programs," Heyman explained. "As our reputation grew and we became more established, our offerings expanded – all of which are free. Today, there's truly something for everyone – whether it's counseling, group support, yoga,

art, or a combination of services. TGP delivers high-quality services across the board."

After retiring in 2018, Heyman remained involved by serving on the board and supporting group programs.

Margo Roth and Eileen Coan were also at TGP from the start.

Roth first met Saffran and Heyman shortly after her son was diagnosed with a brain tumor. At the time, she worried that taking on anything new would be overwhelming. She soon discovered that being part of TGP was not a burden, but a blessing. "I got right on the train," she recalled. "I was so fortunate to have been supported by TGP."

Roth quickly became a cornerstone of the organization, serving as its inaugural board chair for eight years. During her tenure, she played a pivotal role in launching the TGP Vintage Furnishings Warehouse, located at 4911 Commerce Pkwy. in Warrensville Heights. To this day, Roth continues to volunteer at the warehouse, which accepts donations of high-quality furniture and home décor. It hosts monthly sales, with all proceeds directly benefiting TGP's programs. Thanks to the generosity of the community, the inventory is ever-changing – making each shopping visit a fresh and unique experience. The next sale will be held on Saturday, May 17, and Sunday, May 18, from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.

"TGP is an amazing place," she said. "The groups, professionals, and volunteers are outstanding – truly supportive of anyone touched by cancer. Whether you're navigating a diagnosis yourself or supporting a loved one, I can't rave enough about it."

TGP's medical librarian Eileen Coan carries master's degrees in both library science and psychology. She was recruited to help visitors better understand their medical diagnoses by providing clear, current, and credible information tailored to their needs.

"I provide evidence-based answers to people who walk through our doors," Coan explained. "They're often hungry for knowledge – eager to understand, move forward, and reclaim their lives. We offer engagement, encouragement, and the opportunity to be active participants in their care and healing."

Coan has a gift for building relationships and supporting individuals through every step of their journey. "I'm grateful for this role," she said. "And I often see that same gratitude reflected back from the people we serve."



TGP founder and former CEO Eileen Saffran.

In addition to her work as a librarian, Coan leads meditation programs. She's found that virtual sessions have expanded access and deepened the experience. People used to need enough energy to come in, settle down, and participate. Now, they can join from home, stay comfortable, and carry the calm forward long after the session ends.

The passion and dedication of those on the ground floor were instrumental in bringing Saffran's vision to life. Their collective commitment helped complete the circle of care, establishing a collaborative model for delivering comprehensive cancer support in Beachwood and beyond. Together, they set a standard of excellence that has inspired similar efforts both locally and across the country.

During her tenure, Saffran and TGP earned numerous recognitions and awards. Saffran is particularly proud of receiving the Maurice Saltzman Award from the Mt. Sinai Health Care Foundation for her role as a key healthcare provider in the community. She was the third woman in history to receive this prestigious honor from the medical community, solidifying TGP's lasting impact.

When I asked Saffran what was behind her choice to retire, she said, "My priority is to spend time with family and friends, maintain my physical and mental well-being, volunteer in the community, and explore the world!"

In 2019, after more than two decades of tireless service, Saffran passed the baton to Seyranian to carry forward TGP's mission with the same compassion and care. After serving three terms on the board and playing a role in guiding the board's strategic plan, she was clearly the right person to help lead the way.

Saffran then started a consulting firm, MTN Strategies, to continue helping other nonprofits be the best that they can be.

Beachwood Connections

David Ostro, Life Board Member

The Gathering Place offers free support to anyone affected by cancer – whether during treatment, throughout survivorship, or at the end of life. This includes care for individuals as well as their families and caregivers. With counseling, support groups, wellness programs, financial guidance, and a welcoming medical library, every resource is thoughtfully designed to bring comfort, strength, and connection so no one ever feels alone on their cancer journey.

That mission deeply resonates with Beachwood resident David Ostro, a life board member whose commitment to service reflects TGP's spirit. In 2012, as he was concluding 14 years of service on the Beachwood Board of Education, Ostro brought his experience and heart to TGP's board, where he has since served as both treasurer and chair.

Ostro's connection to TGP is deeply personal. When he was just 10 years old, his father was diagnosed with cancer. "Although I was old enough to know something was wrong, I didn't understand the technicalities," he recalled. "Back then, people didn't talk about cancer – it was *'The Big C'*, and there was no place like TGP to turn to for support."

Those memories resurfaced when he considered joining the board. Having supported the organization in the past and believing strongly in its mission, Ostro chose to become more involved.

"I'm proud to be part of an organization that knows how to expand services, meet people's needs, and pivot when necessary," he said. "TGP is truly a remarkable organization with great purpose and dedicated people. Even the largest cities don't have anything like it. It's a true success story – a gem."

For those whose lives have been touched by cancer, TGP provides meaningful support through volunteering.

The success and sustainability of TGP has always been attributed to the unwavering dedication of its volunteers. Over the years, countless individuals have generously donated their time and talents, ensuring the seamless delivery of programs and services. From facilitating support groups to organizing fundraising events, volunteers have been the backbone of the organization, embodying the spirit of community and compassion that defines TGP.



Beachwood residents and TGP supporters David Ostro and Jill Winger.

Jill Winger, Breast Cancer Survivor

Beachwood resident Jill Winger was introduced to TGP after receiving her breast cancer diagnosis. Now a four-year survivor, she shared her journey and gratitude for the support she's received.

Winger stepped through the doors of TGP for nutrition and exercise classes, and joined the dragon boating team.

"Although I was lifting weights and getting stronger, Steven, one of the trainers, shared that I may have permanent limitations as a result of my treatment. That's when I broke down and started to cry," Winger said. "Although I was upset and frustrated, I knew I was in a safe space, being supported and encouraged, because everyone understood what I was going through."

"These are my people, my community," she added. "I now work on strength and endurance, both in person and online, to nourish my mind, body, and spirit."

Winger and her family have donated towels and cross-body bags embossed with a TGP fitness logo, designed by their daughter, that are distributed to participants at The Richman Family Wellness Center. Winger also volunteers when opportunities arise.

"TGP is there for people throughout their journey," she said. "They were there for me and we are now there for them."

The Gathering Place is here to provide support, free of charge, for all touched by cancer. Please connect at www.touchedbycancer.org or 216.595.9546.

As The Gathering Place celebrates its 25th anniversary, it honors the legacy of its founders and sets the stage for the future while reaffirming its mission: to support, educate, and empower individuals and families navigating the challenges of cancer – with compassion, dignity, and unwavering care.

The 25th Anniversary celebration kicks off at Race for the Place, June 1, and will conclude in June 2026. Look for more information concerning special events that will commemorate this significant milestone.

Moving Forward

Under Seyranian's leadership, TGP continues to grow, innovate, and build on the programs and services that existed.

Expanded Outreach

TGP is committed to extending its support services to underserved communities in Northeast Ohio. Recognizing disparities in healthcare access and outcomes, particularly among Black, brown, and LGBTQ+ populations, the organization has implemented several initiatives to bridge these gaps.

This proactive approach ensures that individuals in diverse neighborhoods are aware of the free programs available to them. To support this initiative, TGP has added a bilingual team member.

Mobile Vehicle

As a key component of Seyranian's five-year vision, a mobile vehicle is now a reality. Designed to expand TGP's reach, this state-of-the-art vehicle enables the delivery of personalized services, including fitness, nutrition, art, and education, throughout Cleveland and beyond. With its built-in awning for self-contained programs and broadcasting capabilities, TGP will partner with community centers to offer dynamic, on-the-go services. TGP recently celebrated the vehicle's launch with a ribbon-cutting ceremony and the vehicle will be showcased at Race for the Place, at Beachwood Place, on June 1.

Wig Salon Expansion

In partnership with Regina Brett, TGP expanded its wig salons, which were already located in both of its locations, to MetroHealth and UH Seidman Cancer Center, offering free wigs to those who are undergoing chemotherapy treatments. Now, with the mobile vehicle, a traveling wig salon will support women across Northeast Ohio, including those in underserved areas, focusing on minority women who experience higher cancer mortality rates.

Expanded Programming

TGP continues to add high quality, evidence-based programs based on the times. For example, young-adult cancers are growing exponentially, as are pancreatic, prostate, breast, and lung cancers, so TGP's services and programs continue to evolve, making them relevant to what is happening in today's world.

Virtual programs have also opened doors for people throughout the country and beyond to participate. What started during COVID remains popular. "We're taking a different approach to building programs," Michele said. "While some join us in person, others – due



TGP's Beachwood wig salon and a rendering of TGP's new mobile vehicle, designed to offer on-the-go services.

to transportation or weakened health – are now able to participate online. We want to meet people where they are."

Expanded Partnerships

Today, TGP plays a key supporting role alongside primary clinical care. By partnering with hospitals and physicians, patients are introduced to TGP's services early in their cancer journey. These collaborations ensure that TGP is seamlessly integrated as an essential support system from the very beginning. Today, TGP has staff onsite at MetroHealth and UH Seidman Cancer Center's main campus.

TGP East's Building Reconfiguration

TGP East's building is being evaluated to see how its space can be reconfigured to meet today's needs. For example, a demo kitchen and more one-on-one spaces may be added. Plans to relocate the Richman Family Fitness Center are also underway, and additional spaces are needed to meet the needs of TGP's growing staff and enhanced technology.

Volunteer Opportunities

Volunteers play a crucial role in The Gathering Place's outreach efforts. Opportunities include greeting guests, assisting with clerical duties, tending to Norma's Healing Garden, coordinating special events, representing the organization at community events and health fairs, and working at The Gathering Place's Vintage Furnishings Warehouse. These roles are vital in extending the organization's reach and impact. To learn more, visit www.touchedbycancer.org or call 216.595.9546.

25th Annual Race for the Place

Funding directly impacts The Gathering Place's free cancer support programs

On Sunday, June 1, thousands of residents throughout the Cleveland area will head to Beachwood Place for the 25th annual Race for the Place, a 5K/1-mile walk. In celebration of National Cancer Survivors' Day, Race for the Place provides an opportunity to raise money to support the free programs offered at The Gathering Place to help children, teens, adults, families, and friends cope while on the cancer journey.

"We're calling all former Race for the Place 5K and 1-mile registrants, and all current and former TGP participants, volunteers, and donors to join us on race day as we celebrate survivors and current warriors, and remember those who we have lost to cancer," said Seyranian. "By joining us for a morning of food, fun, and community you can ensure that TGP can continue to help everyone who walks through our doors as they face a life-altering cancer diagnosis."

Registration opens at 7:30 a.m. on race day, with fun for the entire family at Celebration Village beginning at 8 a.m. A National Cancer Survivor Ceremony begins at 8:45 a.m., with the 5K and 1-mile walk/run kicking off at 9 a.m. An awards ceremony will take place at 10:30 a.m.

This year, a Race for the Place after party, starting at 10:45 a.m., will kick off The Gathering Place's 25th anniversary. This celebration will include food trucks, music, games, and much, much more.

We invite you to register, create a team, join a team, donate, or become a sponsor by visiting www.racefortheplace.org. You may also scan this QR code, call the organization at 216.595.9546, or visit The Gathering Place's Beachwood or Westlake location to coordinate participation.

This year, a Race for the Place after party, starting at 10:45 a.m., will kick off The Gathering Place's 25th anniversary. This celebration will include food trucks, music, games, and much, much more.



The Gathering Place Locations:

23300 Commerce Park Rd., Beachwood • 25425 Center Ridge Rd., Westlake



And they're off! Last year, thousands of participants came together to raise money that supports free programs at The Gathering Place. This year's race takes place on June 1. Register today!

Mayor Justin Berns, CEO Michele Seyranian, and Chief Development Officer Adam Ross addressed the crowd as they celebrated National Cancer Survivors' Day at last year's event.



Free Services at The Gathering Place

- Exercise and Movement
- Cooking and Nutrition
- Individual and Group Support
- Healing Arts
- Children and Family Programs
- Grief Support
- Wig Salon
- Medical Library and Resource Center
- Financial and Legal Assistance