

GIVING BACK

Story by Barbara Russi Sarnataro



Ann & John Freely

Cancer survivors Ann and John Freely admit that once you've had cancer, there is always a little part of you that's waiting for the other shoe to drop. That's when Ann, an Arkansas native, likes to recall what another survivor told her.

"At least there's

another shoe up there," she says, laughing.

Ann, 60, is a 17-year survivor of breast cancer. She was diagnosed in her early 40s while living in Philadelphia with her husband John.

"I don't regret having (cancer)," she says, adding that they have made so many friends through the experience.

"The part of cancer that's good is it's kind of gotten us out of a rut. We met all these new people," she says, first in Philadelphia and then in Little Rock when the couple moved here six years ago.

"And you gain perspective," adds John, who was treated at CARTI for prostate cancer in 2009 and is now cancer free. "The tipping point for us was cancer," he says. "We started to realize we have to have as much zest as we can in our lives now. What's the point in having it at the end of our lives?"

That's when the two economists for the Bureau of Labor Statistics decided to retire as early as they could and get on with living.

"In our wedding vows, we said 'we've got 55 years ahead of us,' says John. 'When someone tells you you've got cancer, your scope of view goes from 55 years to 2 weeks.'"

Getting the most out of life includes giving back to CARTI. Ann is the treasurer of the CARTI Auxiliary and volunteers at CARTI a couple days a week. She also serves on the CARTI Auxiliary Festival of Trees committee.

"I like giving back to CARTI because I'm a cancer survivor and I feel more connected to it," says Ann.

The couple also volunteer at many CARTI annual events, including bartending for the Ragin' Cajun Bash and sponsoring a rest stop for Tour de Rock. They've also participated in cancer support groups for patients and survivors.

"The Freelys' rest stop sponsorship has been a real boost for our event," noted Kathi Jones, CARTI Foundation President. "They fund part of it with a personal donation, raise the rest from their friends and spend the entire day assisting Tour de Rock riders."

"Once you're part of this community," says John, "it's life altering." The CARTI staff is unparalleled, he says, from the physicians to the nurses to the volunteers.

"You get the feeling that they're committed to your survival," he says.

"Ann and John are always there for us," continued Jones. "Whenever we need something we can count on them to help us provide support for CARTI's patients as donors, fundraisers and volunteers."

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Ann Freely