

The Ray

SUMMER 2026

The Comunale Cancer Foundation Newsletter



Our Impact 2006 to date

**\$4.6
MILLION**

Direct Financial Assistance

3,175

Food Pantry Bags
Distributed (since 2018)

7,380

Art Therapy Experiences

12,250

Sunshine Bags Distributed
(since 2013)

1,015

Horse Campers

1,600

Holiday Meal Boxes
(each up to 5 meals)

2,400

Jane's Sunshine
Fund Grants

5,250

Gasoline and Grocery
Gift Cards



COMUNALE
CANCER FOUNDATION

20 YEARS OF COMPASSION & SUPPORT

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

John A. Comunale
President

Stephen A. Comunale
Chairman

Amanda Comunale
Vice Chairman

Ruthie George
Secretary

Dale Ruther
Treasurer

Nick Betro

Julie Deane

Kevin Fink

JR Fowler

Brett Haverlick

MEMBER EMERITUS

Rennick Andreoli

Susan B. Schoellkopf

STAFF

Monica Comunale Stevens
Executive Director

Colleen Iacianci
Special Projects





Celebrating 20 Years of the Fighting Spirit

Dear Friends,

It seems like yesterday that I was writing a letter celebrating the Foundation's 10th anniversary. It is hard to believe we are now celebrating 20 years together as a group, still doing the work that brought us together in the first place: easing the burden of cancer for patients and families in our community.

Before there were programs, grants, events, or partnerships, there was my big brother in the final days of his life. I had the honor and heartbreak of being one of his caregivers. I saw up close the strength, humor, courage, and quiet determination that he exuded. Stephen faced the unthinkable with optimism, grace, and what our family has always thought of as his fighting spirit. He will always be my big brother.

I knew I wanted to find a way to share Stephen's fighting spirit with others. Very quickly, that "I" became "we," as family, friends, board members, and supporters banded together with purpose. We wanted to help people facing cancer feel less alone. We wanted to create something that could offer meaningful, immediate support to families going through what Stephen had gone through. Most of all, we wanted to help put a smile on a cancer patient's face during one of the hardest struggles of their life.

Twenty years later, the mission is still deeply personal. The Comunale Cancer Foundation exists to provide financial assistance, partner programming, comfort, dignity, and moments of joy to local families battling cancer. We have grown and matured as an organization, but we have never lost sight of the simple promise made at the very beginning: to offer the kind of practical and compassionate support we wished for others facing what Stephen faced.

From the beginning, we were fortunate to have a special working board and a core group of supporters who believed in that promise. Most of our board has been with us since the earliest days, working hard to help turn a memory into something that could serve the community. Their commitment, generosity, and belief in this mission have shaped every part of what we have become.

This past year, we lost two of those original board members: Nick George and Dr. Dennis McCluskey. Nick was my longtime mentor, friend, and attorney. Dennis was a beloved family practitioner and a friend to so many of us. Both men understood the importance of helping people when they need it most. They cared deeply about this Foundation, about our community, and about the people we serve. Their impact on our organization, and on many of us personally, will always be remembered.

Our team remains together and as focused as ever. We are still guided by the same original mission: to ease the burden of cancer, to fill the gap for families, and to remind patients that they are not alone.

Our core financial assistance program, designed to provide direct, prompt, and practical support, has grown from Summit County to include Medina, Portage, Stark, and Wayne Counties as well. These grants help with the day-to-day financial needs that do not stop when cancer begins: rent, mortgage payments, utilities, transportation, groceries, and other urgent needs that can become overwhelming during treatment.

But our work has never been only about bills. It is also about hope, dignity, connection, and small moments of joy.

We have added a Wig Boutique at Cleveland Clinic Akron General, where patients can find wigs, hats, care kits, and support in a thoughtful setting so they do not have to navigate that moment alone. We have added a Renewal Nook at the Summa Health Barberton Campus, a spa-like sanctuary where patients can care for their bodies and focus on something other than cancer treatment, even if only for a little while. We are also excited about a new partnership with Aultman Hospital that will allow us to expand our reach and provide additional support to patients and families in Stark and surrounding counties.

We continue to support families through our Back-to-School program, helping children in families affected by cancer start the school year with the supplies they need. We deliver holiday meals because no family battling cancer should spend the holidays worrying about what is for dinner. And one of my personal favorites, Jane's Sunshine Bags, honors my mom by bringing comfort, care, and a little brightness to patients during treatment.

Each of these programs reflects the same belief: compassion matters. Practical help matters. A smile matters. A patient knowing that someone sees them, remembers them, and cares about them matters.

None of this would be possible without the people doing the work every day. My aunt Monica has served as Executive Director for many years, devoting herself to serving those in our community. I am incredibly proud of how hard Monica has worked to honor the memory of our catalyst, Stephen, while helping guide the Foundation into a professional, mature, and trusted organization. Thank you, Monica.

Monica has built deep relationships with social workers, hospitals, oncology centers, and other community organizations like Stewart's Caring Place. She has kept the Foundation closely connected to the people we serve and to the professionals who understand where the needs are greatest. She knows that our work is not simply about writing checks or creating programs. It is about meeting people where they are, listening to what they need, and helping in a way that feels immediate, human, and personal.

As we look ahead, there will be new faces on our board to help carry us into the next decade with expanded focus, perspective, and energy. But even as we grow, our mission will remain rooted in the same place it began: Stephen's fighting spirit.

Stephen showed us how to live with courage, humor, strength, and love, even in the face of something unimaginable. The rest is up to us.

On behalf of the Comunale family and the entire Comunale Cancer Foundation, thank you to everyone who has been part of this 20-year journey. Thank you to our board members, donors, volunteers, hospital partners, social workers, caregivers, community organizations, friends, and families who have helped us carry this mission forward.

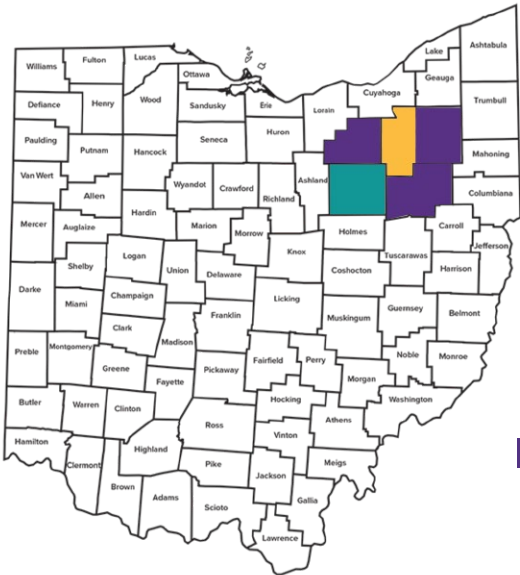
Most of all, thank you to the patients and families who have allowed us to be a small part of their lives. You are the reason we do this work. You inspire us every day. And you remind us why, 20 years later, Stephen's fighting spirit continues to live on through this work.

With gratitude,
John Comunale
President and Co-Founder, Comunale Cancer Foundation

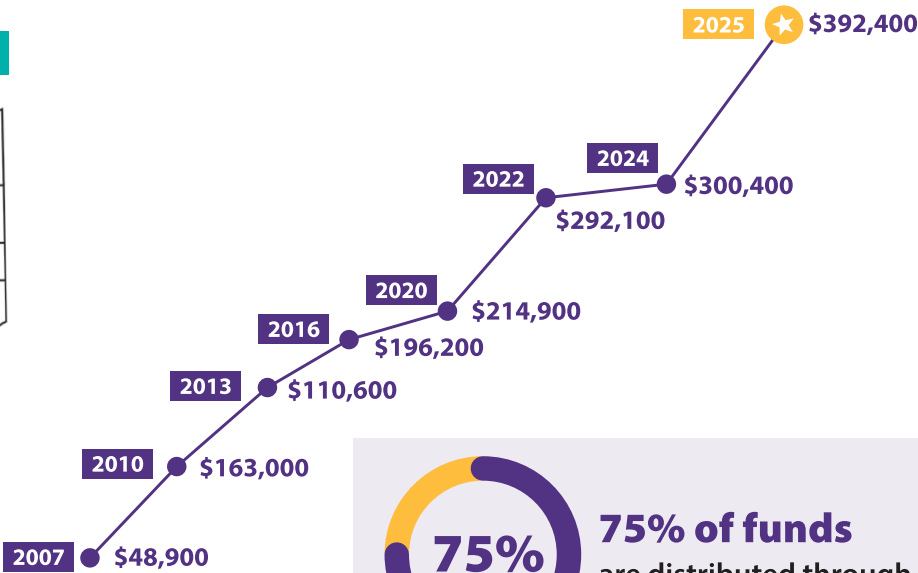


Our Growth

2006 - 2023 2023 - 2025 2025+



Historical Giving Through Grants



75% of funds are distributed through financial assistance grants.

A Night to Remember

COMMUNITY RAISES **\$1.6 MILLION** FOR CANCER SUPPORT



On September 27th, 2025, Akron's historic Goodyear Hall came alive with purpose as 900 guests gathered for The Event: It's a Celebration, an unforgettable evening benefiting the Comunale Cancer Foundation. The atmosphere was electric from the moment guests arrived, greeted by surprise performances from talented aerial artists who set the tone for an extraordinary night.

Attendees enjoyed gourmet food stations featuring culinary excellence from Beau's Grille while participating in live and silent auctions that showcased the generosity of our supporters. The evening reached its pinnacle with an electrifying performance by Rock and Roll Hall of Famers Kool & The Gang, whose legendary hits had everyone on their feet. The Event isn't complete without late night treats to enjoy like pizza, subs, and gelato.

The true success of the evening, however, is measured not just in memories made but in impact achieved. Together, over \$1.6 million was raised! These funds have a direct and immediate effect on cancer patients and their families in our community.

This remarkable achievement would not have been possible without the fabulous support of our sponsors and volunteers. We are deeply grateful for their support. The dollars they helped raise have a direct and immediate impact, covering basic needs during a cancer patients' treatment. The expenses covered, like transportation, gas, groceries, utilities, and rent, ease the burden of cancer and allow patients to focus on healing.

To everyone who attended, donated, volunteered, and supported this event—thank you. Your generosity provides hope, comfort, and critical resources to families facing cancer.

Creativity Heals

A DECADE OF HEALING THROUGH ART

For over a decade, the Comunale Cancer Foundation partnered with Cleveland Clinic Akron General's McDowell Cancer Center on an art therapy program that quietly transformed waiting rooms, survivorship events, and the lives of patients who needed more than medicine. The collaboration was born in 2013 from a simple but powerful belief that people touched by cancer deserve spaces of beauty, expression, and connection. What grew from that seed was a multifaceted partnership across four signature programs, each designed to meet patients where they were, whether newly diagnosed, mid-treatment, or walking into survivorship with fresh eyes.

At Home Art Kits

During the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Foundation funded art kits sent home with patients which offered a creative lifeline when socialization came to a sudden halt.

Survivorship Celebrations

These sponsored events honored cancer survivors with meaningful gifts and art experiences marking the milestone of survival with ceremony, community, and joy.

Art Shows

Original works created by those touched by cancer were displayed in the McDowell Cancer Center and community locations like the Summit County Public Courthouse for a few weeks each year — transforming lobbies into a gallery of resilience.

Collaborative Art Projects

Of everything born from this partnership, it was the collaborative art projects that left the deepest mark. Each year, the hospital's art therapist, Amber Gano, would conceive a themed piece — something large enough in spirit to hold the stories of dozens of individuals. Over the course of 12 to 16 months, patients at every stage of their journey would contribute: a brushstroke, a collage, a carefully folded form. Some came in for a single session. Others returned again and again.

The finished pieces were never predictable, but they were always stunning. Themes of strength, faith, hope, and acceptance wove themselves through every work, not because anyone prescribed them, but because that is what patients brought to the canvas. The collaborative art projects became a kind of collective portrait of what it means to face cancer and endure.

Looking Ahead

While this landmark partnership has reached its natural conclusion, the Foundation remains committed to art therapy as a healing force and looks forward to forging new relationships and new canvases onto which strength and hope can be painted together.



2025
By the
Numbers
\$540,000
Total Giving

\$392,400

Financial Assistance to **950** Individuals



550

Holiday Meal Boxes



450

Sunshine Bags

\$17,100 in Sunshine Fund Grants
for **200** Individuals and Families



1,000

Food Pantry Bags



1,530

Art Therapy Patients

503 Gas & Grocery Gift Cards

50 Back to School Bags & Supplies



The Awakening Bear
2025

The final collaborative piece of the partnership depicts a bear emerging from months of deep winter slumber - symbolizing the end of treatment and the tentative, wondrous return to self. Like a patient stepping out of the fog of chemotherapy and into a new morning, the bear stretches toward renewed strength, curiosity, and life. It is a fitting final chapter: powerful, tender, and full of hope for what comes next.



Birds of a Feather Heal Together
2024



Depths of Belief
2022



Elephant in the Room
2020



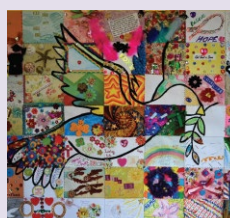
Forging Ahead U.S.S. Believe
2018



Rooted in Strength
2016



Ribbons of Courage
2015



Pieces of Peace
2014



Wings of Hope
2013

VISIT OUR NEW WEBSITE
stephencomunale.org



Expanded Access to Food Pantry

When a cancer patient sits down to eat, the act that most people take for granted can feel like an obstacle course. Nausea lingers and appetite fades yet the body needs nourishment more than ever. For families already stretched thin by medical costs, lost income, and the relentless demands of treatment, keeping healthy food on the table can feel impossible.

That is precisely why, since 2019, the Comunale Cancer Foundation has been proud to partner with Stewart's Caring Place to operate a dedicated food pantry serving cancer patients and their families. Now, that commitment has grown into their second location, Aunt Susie's Wellness Center in Canton, Ohio.

The expansion of this program to Stark County reflects both the depth of need in the region and the strength of the partnership that makes this work possible. We are deeply proud of this partnership and of the quiet, essential work it does every day. Behind every bag of groceries is a patient who can focus a little more on healing, and a family that can breathe a little easier.

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“Food insecurity significantly affects the population we serve. Many individuals with a cancer diagnosis experience financial strain, which can lead to difficulty in accessing food. Having an onsite food pantry provides immediate access to food, alleviating some of the financial and mental stress associated with a cancer diagnosis.”

Sarah Vojtek

President, Stewart's Caring Place

A Space to Restore

A NEW HAVEN FOR CANCER PATIENTS IN CANTON



Some moments in a cancer journey call for more than treatment — they call for sanctuary. An enhanced partnership with Aultman Cancer Center will transform under-utilized space into a dedicated space of dignity, comfort, and care. A beautifully dedicated wig salon and two purposefully designed therapy spaces for services such as massage and reiki will open late 2026.

The hospital has long offered these meaningful supportive services to its patients within standard treatment rooms. Through our enhanced partnership, the Comunale Cancer Foundation will financially support the transformation of an existing space on the second floor into rooms designed intentionally for restoration.

The dedicated wig salon will offer patients experiencing hair loss a private, affirming space to explore options with confidence. Two additional spaces will provide a calm retreat for healing modalities that address the emotional and physical toll of treatment. These spaces are designed not to feel clinical, but to feel restorative.

This initiative aligns deeply with our Foundation's mission to ease the burden of cancer and represents an exciting expansion of our presence in Stark County in a lasting and permanent way. With a target opening in 2026, we could not be prouder of what this space will mean to the patients who walk through its doors.



“

On behalf of our entire organization, thank you for your extraordinary support. Your commitment will enable us to elevate our facilities for cancer patients, reinforcing our mission to deliver excellent care with compassion.”

Ryan Kuharich

*Vice President of Cancer Services,
Aultman Health Foundation*





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Please join us and help us celebrate

THE EVENT

09.25.27

Mark your calendars and look for more information to come on this wonderful event.

For more information about our foundation, call **234.706.2052** or visit **stephencomunale.org**