



# Celebrating 15 Years of Running, Walking and Rockin' to End Ovarian Cancer

By Bridget Cook



Founder, Gretchen and extended family at 2017 Race (Gretchen in center in grey sweatshirt).

In 2003, about 100 runners in Northeast Ohio gathered together in hopes of finding healing, celebrating life, and raising awareness for ovarian cancer. They were unified by a terrible disease, one that impacted their beloved mothers, sisters, daughters, friends, and aunts, but lacked awareness and viable screening and treatment options.

Fifteen years ago, a small, mighty and passionate group of volunteers brought their vision of OutRunning Ovarian Cancer to life. Now, in 2018, OROC sees upwards of 2,500 teal-clad participants each summer in its annual 5K Run/Walk. Since its inception, OROC has generated more than \$1,000,000 in funds for ovarian cancer research and education in Northeast Ohio. Held at the outdoor plaza of the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum and routed throughout downtown Cleveland, the event is a way for families, survivors and community members to come together, show support, and spread a message of hope.

As anyone involved with the organization knows, however, OROC is much more than just a one-day event. Through partnerships with the Cleveland Clinic, MetroHealth and University Hospitals, OROC has been able to support ovarian cancer patients, survivors and their families like never before. OROC founder, Gretchen Nock, expressed gratitude for the medical community in Northeast Ohio, explaining that the partnerships have allowed her to “peek behind the curtain and really see the collaborative nature of the region.”

Nock lost her mother to ovarian cancer after being diagnosed in 1993. Options for screening and treatment were limited, leaving Nock and her family desperately wanting better opportunities. When her aunt was diagnosed in 2003, Nock felt compelled to act. “What we thought was random quickly became familial,” Nock explained. “In 2003, we decided to do a run. We never thought it would grow so much. The first year there were more volunteers than participants.”

The feeling of community that comes with each OROC race is incredible to witness. “The day of the race is mind blowing. Looking out at the faces of the families and teams, to see all their uniquely designed T-shirts, is very humbling for us,” Nock said. Ovarian cancer survivors at the event are given special shirts in recognition, and Nock was happy to report that more survivor shirts get distributed each year. “We’re getting more and more survivors, and actually running out of survivor T-shirts for them.”

In the past 15 years, the growth of OROC’s event as well as its impact have been a testament to the hard work of Nock and her team, all of whom are unpaid volunteers. “After the second year, I think we knew we were on to something. As the years have gone on, the recognition within the medical community has meant so much. We are now a go-to organization for the medical community to send their patients to,” Nock said.

Through its work, OROC strives to help women recognize signs and symptoms of the disease, as well as to show solidarity and support for women in the midst of their treatment. Projects stemming from OROC funds include everything from cutting edge research projects to helping patients with bus fares to and from chemotherapy sessions. Additionally, an improved patient navigator system at the Cleveland Clinic, the OROC Hope & Healing Garden and the OROC Cancer Center Resource Library at MetroHealth, and the renovation of a private exam room at the University Hospitals Seidman Cancer Center are all in place as a result of OROC funding.

OROC’s biggest goal, however, remains the one Nock and her team has wanted from the moment their organization began. “There’s still no reliable screening test [for ovarian cancer,]” Nock said. “Our goal is still the same, 25 years from my mother’s diagnosis. But with this group of devoted volunteers, this city’s medical community, and this technology, I truly think we are going to be the ones who find the screening test.”



OutRun Ovarian Cancer

[www.oroc.org](http://www.oroc.org)