

WCU Unsung Hero: Kristin Williams



Seth Birch, Matt Williams '12, and Kristin Williams at the Scramble for Shelly.

Kristin Williams hasn't worked at WCU all that long – she celebrated her first year on the job in December – but chances are you know her work even if you don't know her. As the web content writer for WCU's Web Team, she writes many of the pages you read on the University's website.

She also is involved in design projects and frequently takes photo for the site.

While Williams is a born multi-tasker, she had no idea how much her ability to juggle it all would be needed when she began working here. About a month earlier, her mother, Shelly Bone, complained of stomach pains that wouldn't go away. Bone was a vibrant 53-year-old nurse who ran 5Ks and had never been seriously ill up to that point. Thus, no one – not her three kids, not her husband, or she – was initially very worried. But after a lot of doctor visits, Bone discovered that she had a large tumor on her pancreas.

"I got the call with the news as I was walking back to my office after new employee orientation," recalls Williams.

Bone was told that she would need surgery to remove 40 percent of her pancreas, her gall bladder, and a foot of small intestine. With only a few weeks of work under her belt, Williams wasn't sure how her supervisor, Kim Slattery, would react to her need to take time off.

"As soon as I started talking to Kim, any worries I had were immediately gone," says Williams. "Kim was so supportive, as was every single one of my colleagues on the Web Team. Everybody pitched in to help me, and I got all my projects completed so I am could be there for my mom."

"Kristin was clearly preoccupied with her mom's condition, but felt work was a good distraction," says Slattery. "The team and I closely monitored her and encouraged her to be where she needed to be....work, or with her mom, on a daily basis."

The surgery took place December 31, 2014. In January, Bone received the news that she had stage II pancreatic cancer. The doctors believe that the tumor had been there for about 10 years, not causing any symptoms, but spreading during that time into her lymph nodes and surrounding tissue.

Once Williams heard the diagnosis, she felt compelled to spring into action. “My mom was so positive throughout her surgery and later during chemotherapy,” she says. “Despite how positive she was, I felt so helpless. I couldn't take the pain from her, which I would have gladly done, but I had to do something.”

Although Williams was juggling her job, frequent visits to her mom, and caring for her then infant daughter, she decided to raise funds – and awareness – for pancreatic cancer.

“A friend of mine whose mother had passed away from pancreatic cancer told me about the Lustgarten Foundation. I found them to be a great source of information,” she says. “Marc Lustgarten was a vice chairman at Cablevision who died of pancreatic cancer in 1999. Because of Cablevision's continued support of the Lustgarten Foundation, 100 percent of every donation goes directly to pancreatic cancer research.”

Williams didn't just write a check to the foundation and leave it at that. Instead, she decided to raise funds with a golf outing, which she dubbed the “Scramble for Shelly.” She set the date – Oct. 10, 2015 – and the venue – Raven's Claw Golf Club in Pottstown – and started working through the myriad details involved in planning a major fundraising event.

Knowing how much she had to manage, her husband – WCU alumnus Matthew Williams '12, immediately jumped in to assist. Longtime friend and fellow WCU employee Seth Birch also helped a great deal.

After months of hard work and what Williams describes as a “ton of family support and tremendous outpouring from our community,” the tournament day arrived. October 10 dawned warm and sunny. However, as the event had grown closer, Bone's condition had worsened. Her husband, Rick, and her mother and two sisters stayed by her side while the rest of the family, and many others, headed to the golf club. Nearly 100 golfers in all would participate in the event.

The “Scramble for Shelly Golf Outing” was a success beyond Williams' wildest dreams – raising more than \$15,000 for pancreatic research. But afterwards, when she headed to her parents' house to say goodnight, she found out, upon arriving, that her mother had just passed away.

“My Mom was the best mom ever and to others, she was a great friend and a wonderful nurse who loved helping people,” says Williams. “Not a day goes by when I don't think about her.”

Williams continues to feel compelled to “do something.” Currently, she is busy getting ready for the “Second Annual Scramble for Shelly,” which will be held Oct. 8. To register or for more info, go to <http://scrambleforshelly.com>.

“Pancreatic cancer has few early warning signs, and as a result, like in my Mom's case, it is rarely discovered early,” says Williams. “When early symptoms do occur, they are often vague and nonspecific – stomach pain, nausea, weight loss and loss of appetite. If something doesn't seem right, see a doctor. In addition, at least 10 percent of all pancreatic cancers are inherited. If you have a first-degree relative with the disease, find out about familial registries and surveillance programs at the Lustgarten Foundation website, <http://lustgarten.org/homepage>.”

“It is hard to think about the fact that my 18-month-old daughter won’t get a chance to know my mom,” says Williams. “My goal is to see enough funds raised for research so that someday we can find a cure for pancreatic cancer.”