

## Craig's Cause Maritime Bike Tour | Event will be in Fredericton on July 29

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Stefanie Condon-Oldreive is on a mission to ensure all pancreatic-cancer patients know the facts about their disease.



(SUBMITTED PHOTO)

These are a few of the 16 cyclists who will participate in the first Craig's Cause Maritime Bike Tour next week to raise awareness about pancreatic cancer. In the back row, from left, are: George Clark, Mark Schofield, Jeff Bonang, Morris Schafer and Stefanie Condon-Oldreive. In the front row, from left, are: Cody Madaughlin, John Dobrowski and Michael Harrigan.

She says she first realized how little information was available to Canadians with pancreatic cancer four years ago when her father, Craig Condon of Porters Lake, N.S., received his diagnosis.

"He had come home from a trip to Alaska in May," she says. "He had acid reflux and an upset stomach. Almost overnight, he turned yellow, and his doctor thought he had picked up hepatitis C from drinking untreated water in small communities while he was away."

Condon-Oldreive says her father was tested several times, but the tests were all negative. Eventually his doctors considered other possibilities, eventually diagnosing Condon with pancreatic cancer in July of 2006.

"I'm very analytical, just like my dad, so immediately I went to the Internet to look for information and support groups," she says. "I found out that there weren't any in Canada. I couldn't find anything about physicians trained to treat pancreatic cancer in Canada; everything I found was American, and that was really frustrating."

Condon, who was an avid cyclist at the age of 63, learned he was a candidate for the Whipple Procedure, an invasive surgery that physicians consider to be the only possible cure for pancreatic cancer. The surgery involves the removal of significant portions of at least five organs.

His physicians were optimistic Condon had a good chance of survival, but in September 2006, he died due to complications caused by the procedure within two months of his initial diagnosis.

Condon-Oldreive says she wanted to help the doctors who tried to save her father's life.

"Here in Canada, less than one per cent of funds that go toward cancer research are directed toward pancreatic cancer," she says. "It's a very minimal amount. We knew these physicians were interested in researching more about pancreatic cancer, and we wanted to support them with their research."

She says it wasn't hard to get started, as she received about \$8,000 in memorial donations. A friend suggested she also find a way to share the information she'd learned about pancreatic cancer with others, and so an organization called Craig's Cause and the accompanying website [www.craigscase.ca](http://www.craigscase.ca) were born.

From its inception, Condon-Oldreive says the website was used by Canadians looking for information about pancreatic cancer. She says it's unique in the amount and type of information it provides.

"We have the most updated information about the disease, treatments and the pancreas," she says. "We have an advocacy page, questions patients can take down to ask their doctor and we have the page I couldn't find, which lists all the physicians in Canada who can treat pancreatic cancer and their contact info. We have a discussion board, we have a link where patients can ask a medical question and a physician will answer them. We also have support advocates that will help the patients get through the process."

She says it's vital that people with pancreatic cancer have access to all available information so they can consider their options as quickly as possible, as the length of survival is often brief following diagnosis.

"Patients need to know their options so they can know what to ask," she says. "Physicians aren't always telling people who are eligible for surgery that the Whipple Procedure is an option because it's so risky, but it's the only possible cure. About 10 to 15 per cent of people diagnosed with pancreatic cancer are candidates for the Whipple. Of that group, about five per cent will survive past five years."

"Many physicians don't think that's enough of a success rate to perform such a risky surgery, but should that be up to the physician or the patient? Some of the research we've funded will present this issue on an international level, about how patients feel when they're presented with the statistics. For now, we want people to know where they can turn for information."

In addition to raising funds through the website, Craig's Cause hosts a bike tour in Porters Lake each year. Condon-Oldreive says the support for this event has increased every year. This year, she says, Craig's Cause is trying out something new, in an attempt to expand the spread of the group's message.

"This year we're doing the Maritime Bike Tour," Condon-Oldreive says. "We're leaving July 28 and going through the three Maritime provinces. We'll be stopping at eight hospitals along the way and holding information sessions."

"This is important because pancreatic cancer has the highest fatality rate and it's the fourth leading cause of all cancer-related deaths, yet so little is known about it."

Some of the 16 participating cyclists, including Condon-Oldreive, have been affected by pancreatic cancer, and each biker has raised \$2,500 toward the cause.

The tour will arrive in Fredericton next week. Condon-Oldreive says the group plans to hold an information session at the Dr. Everett Chalmers Regional Hospital on July 29 at 1 p.m. She says the cyclists plan to have some helpful resources available to hand out.

"We have Canada's first DVD and accompanying booklet to go with it," she says. "It was written by Dr. Michele Molinari, and we're going to be leaving copies at the hospital for any patients who would like them. It tells them all the information they need to know about pancreatic cancer."

"The DVDs were produced keeping in mind that not everyone can read a booklet and take in all the info they're being given. It can be overwhelming. With the DVD, they can watch it later and have some visuals."

She says the tour is a chance to raise awareness about pancreatic cancer, which she says often doesn't have much of a voice since it leaves so few survivors.

"We're trying to be the voice for pancreatic cancer now," she said. "With the Maritime Bike Tour, we're trying to reach out to other provinces and let people know more about it, and where they can get information."

"With pancreatic cancer, the population that's affected isn't as big as with cancers such as breast cancer, yet pancreatic cancer kills a much larger percentage of the people who do get it. So little is known about it, and the voices aren't there to knock on doors and say, 'Look at me, I'm a survivor,' like you have with all other cancers."

Condon-Oldreive says another important part of the bike tour is to emphasize that pancreatic-cancer affects people of every demographic.

"I think the biggest stereotype of pancreatic cancer is that it's an old man's disease, or that you're a smoker or a drinker if you have it," she says. "Dad was 63, and he was a really healthy individual who didn't smoke or drink. Another cyclist, Michael Harrigan, who will be speaking at the hospital in Fredericton, just lost a 28-year old daughter, Krista, who was a marathon runner, to pancreatic cancer. We want people to see that it can affect anyone."

She says she hopes to see more chapters of Craig's Cause open in other parts of Canada, so everyone dealing with the disease can access crucial information.

"The bike tour will be our first attempt to branch out of Nova Scotia and make ourselves available to caregivers and patients in other provinces," she says.

What: The first Craig's Cause Maritime Bike Tour

Information: The tour will be stopping at the Dr. Everett Chalmers Regional Hospital in Fredericton on July 29 at 1 p.m. Stefanie Condon-Oldreive, whose father died of pancreatic cancer, will be joined by other speakers to discuss facts about the disease and provide resources.

Contact: Visit [www.craigscase.ca](http://www.craigscase.ca) or email [info@craigscase.ca](mailto:info@craigscase.ca).

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