Local health advocate earns international award

STORY AND PHOTO BY AMY BARTLETT Siuslaw News

Bob Horney, local advocate for prostate cancer patients, received a prestigious honor this month. The Edward C. Kaps Hope Award, presented by the non-profit organization Us TOO, was given to Horney for his efforts to educate patients and their families about prostate cancer.

One of only seven award winners this year, Horney was flown to Chicago to receive the honor on Dec. 2.

“It was totally unexpected,” he said this week. “It was especially meaningful because of those who nominated me.”

“Bob is kind of a big deal,” said Stephanie Kerns, community outreach director for the Oregon Urology Institute, whose physicians and officials nominated Horney.

“The award is truly international,” added Kerns. “For them (Us TOO) to recognize and know who Bob is and for the board to pick him is a huge honor.”

Horney’s journey began when he received a diagnosis of prostate cancer in December 2001, at the age of 62, not long after he and his wife Marianne moved to Florence.

The couple went through a miserable time, said Horney, searching for answers to their questions. They decided surgery would be the most beneficial.

“We learned there was a support group in Florence called Man-to-Man that met in the conference room at the hospital,” he said. They rushed to attend a meeting before the scheduled surgery.

“There were five or six men in attendance. They were actual prostate cancer survivors,” said Horney. “The support group gave us hope.”

After undergoing a radical prostatectomy in January 2002, he continued his involvement with the group, eventually becoming its facilitator.

“Here is a guy who has gone through this himself,” said Kerns, who added that Bob’s own story about his cancer is compelling due to its “rawness and openness.”

“Men of his generation often stay quiet about the diagnosis,” she said. “We have met women who did not know their husbands had been diagnosed.”
Horney worked to increase the group’s visibility, arranging for speakers, posting fliers, submitting articles to the newspaper and fostering relationships with urologic oncologists at the Oregon Urology Institute.

Nearly 10 years later, the group now averages 25 to 30 members and has had as many as 50 members meeting monthly.

“It’s a team effort,” said Horney. Dr. Bryan Mehlhaff, who attends most of the evening meetings, and Dr. Douglas Hoff, who attends the lunch meetings, answer patient questions about diagnosis and treatment options. Member Jim Buch facilitates the lunch group.

On the flip side, prostate cancer survivors answer newcomers’ questions from a patient’s standpoint, something the doctors cannot do. Wives and partners attend, too, and Horney has found their input invaluable. “The women ask questions the men are afraid to ask,” he said. Horney uses whatever technology is available. The group has a website and also conducts “tele-consults,” in which recently diagnosed men call, some from as far away as Ketchikan, Alaska, during meetings so the doctor and members can answer their questions.

He has also been instrumental in encouraging the start of a support group in the Eugene-Springfield area. Aside from coping with the struggles inherent in fighting cancer, the group has also had to deal with a bit of politics. Florence Man-to-Man, which was affiliated with the American Cancer Society (ACS), also became a chapter of Us Too in 2004. In 2010, ACS revised its cancer screening guidelines to recommend that men at age 50 should decide whether to be screened only after discussing the risks and benefits with a physician. The previous year, the American Urologic Association recommended baseline screening at age 40, following such a discussion with the patient’s physician. Because of the disparity in recommendations, the Florence Us TOO group decided to split from ACS, thus losing its financial support. The Oregon Urologic Foundation has stepped in to help with costs of running the group. As Horney explained it, the decision was difficult, but the right one. “Those in our group who were diagnosed early were alive. Those diagnosed later were not,” he said.

Nominating Horney for the award was given for Oregon Urology Institute. “I hope the community does not take this for granted,” said Kerns. “It’s wonderful what Bob does. He has impacted so many people. There is a ripple effect. You help one person, who helps someone else, and it resonates through their families.”