

PITTSBURGH TRIBUNE-REVIEW

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SECTION

B

Saturday,
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identifies Sheraden man as killer **B3** • Obituaries **B4-B5** • **BUSINESS** GM vows perfect record **B8**

Carnegie Mellon prof's widow takes up cause

Her husband became a national symbol of the fight against pancreatic and other cancers.

BY ALLISON M. HEINRICHS
TRIBUNE-REVIEW

Don't call Jai Pausch a survivor.

Exactly what word the widow of the renowned Carnegie Mellon University professor would use to describe herself is still to be determined.

"Survivors are the people who actually have lived through the cancer treatment and are cancer-free," she said in an interview shortly before today's first anniversary of her husband's death from pancreatic cancer. "I was Randy's wife, I was his full-time caregiver, and now I'm unemployed and there really isn't a word for me in our culture. What

Gala for cancer

What: The Ladies Hospital Aid Society's 2009 Annual Gala, which this year features honorary chair Jai Pausch and raises money for cancers of the digestive system

When: 6:30 p.m. Aug. 22

Where: Westin Convention Center Hotel, Downtown

To attend: Call 412-648-6106.

For more information: Visit www.lhas.net

am I now?"

"Advocate" might be the best word.

Pausch, 42, will serve as honorary chair of the Ladies Hospital Aid Society's annual gala Aug. 22 to raise money for research into pancreatic and colon cancer at the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine. She has helped raise

money for the Pancreatic Cancer Action Network and the Lustgarten Foundation for pancreatic cancer research.

"She has a great message," said Dee Dee Troutman, executive director of the aid society. "Her reaction when we talked about being able to support pancreatic cancer and colon cancer research was that she was delighted to help in any way to get the message out there."

Randy Pausch, a computer science professor, lived for nearly two years after his initial cancer diagnosis. Millions worldwide viewed his inspiring lecture on the Internet and turned his life-affirming book, "The Last Lecture," into a best-seller.

Throughout her husband's public cancer battle, Pausch made a few public appearances with her husband. She spent most of her time taking care of her husband



TRIBUNE-REVIEW FILE PHOTO

Randy Pausch is shown with Logan (left) and Dylan. His wife Jai, holding Chloe, has become an advocate for cancer research.

Prof's widow takes up cause

WIDOW • FROM B1

while raising their three young children.

Since his death, Pausch has agreed to interviews and appearances for charitable causes.

"It is very expensive to do these studies, to hire nurses to supervise, to pay rent," said Dr. Robert E. Schoen, a Pitt professor of medicine who is working on a vaccine for colorectal cancer and a blood test to find people at risk for it. "So having research support is essential. It's like seed money. ... Once we can demonstrate that a project is safe and has potential, we can go and try to get more money to do a bigger study."

Pausch sees such research as the best chance to cure the cancer that killed her husband.

"Currently there is no good way to detect the cancer early and what we have for treatment doesn't work," she said. "When only 5 percent of the people diagnosed with pancreatic cancer actually survive five years, that's pretty abysmal."

Pausch's children — Dylan, 7, Logan, 5, and Chloe, 3 — had a lot of fears after their father died.

"They'd say, 'My daddy died of cancer, am I going to die of cancer?' I talked with them about that. There was a real fear inside their hearts," Pausch said. "That's gotten less and less. I think that they've accepted it."

The family moved to Chesapeake, Va., shortly after Randy Pausch's diagnosis to be close to both their families.

"It's chaotic — I think that's a really good word," Pausch said. "I'm still making friends here and my kids are going to school and they're growing and moving forward."

Still, Pausch cherishes the time she spent in Pittsburgh.

"I loved Pittsburgh and let me just say, I know that Pittsburghers are always yammering and yapping about their image, that it's not as super-trendy as so-and-so place," she said. "But Pittsburgh has so much to offer, so much cultural diversity, and I miss living there tremendously."