Cancer survivor opens office to aid others

By William V. Foley
For The Chamber

ELLWOOD CITY — It was a phone call Cara Atkinson received 10 years ago that changed her life, and ultimately has helped others to change theirs.

Atkinson, 33, of Ellwood City, learned from her physician she had been diagnosed as having cancer, and while a surgery successfully removed half of her thyroid gland to allow her to “become cancer-free,” she said — a friend from Slippery Rock University of Pennsylvania faced more dire circumstances.

“She was going through treatments and surgeries at the same time,” Atkinson said. “I was lucky to have my cancer removed surgically and didn’t have to undergo chemotherapy.”

It was one of the factors that prompted Atkinson to open a wellness and health coaching office in Old Allegheny Square, 105 E. Main St., last month, and despite the unusual circumstances, Atkinson said she wants to “promote healthy changes for others.”

“I want to help others be healthier,” she said. “I want to help people lead longer, better lives.”

Atkinson received a call last year from the late J.W. Gray of the Ellwood City Chamber of Commerce, offering to help her and her business get off the ground.

“I don’t know how I would have done it without him,” Atkinson said. “He was really wonderful. He gave me a lot of time and effort and helped me every step of the way.”

Gray started his own construction company in the early 1970s and eventually moved to the Ellwood City Plaza, formerly known as the Blaylock Plaza. He died in April 2017.

Atkinson plans to work seven days a week from her office and is available by appointment for stress management, nutrition and fitness coaching.

“As I was going through cancer at 23, I learned a lot about personal health and fitness,” Atkinson said. “I want to be a resource for others who are going through cancer, or people who are looking for ways to lose weight.”

Atkinson is accepting appointments for clients in need of health coaching and also offers group nutrition classes. Information on her services can be found on her website, caratatkinson.com.

RELATED STORIES

See Hope, Page 3

RELAY TARGETS CURE PAGE 5

A golfer in the Ellwood City Area Chamber of Commerce’s 30th annual golf open purchases raffle tickets before the tournament June 25.

Nick Miller, 13, of Grove City, fires a ball toward a dunk tank target at the Ellwood City Community Plaza during the Ellwood City Relay for Life on June 2.

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Volunteers target E.C. creek

Dates for final stretch of 50-mile cleaning project set

By William V. Foley
For The Chamber

ELLWOOD CITY — A nonprofit organization that in 2017 became a member of the Ellwood City Area Chamber of Commerce is seeking volunteers to help remove debris from a 10-mile stretch of the Connoquenessing Creek from Ellwood City to its discharge into the Beaver River at Rock Point, the final leg of the Freedom group’s seven-year, 50-mile project.

Used by Ellwood City area residents for recreation such as kayaking, canoeing, rafting, fishing and swimming, the Connoquenessing has improved in the six years since the Allegheny Aquatic Alliance began its effort to clean what was rated in 2000 as the second most polluted waterway in the United States, said Christina Handley, president of the alliance.

Since the 2000 rating by the U.S. Public Interest Group, in which Connoquenessing trailed only the Mississippi River in a study of the country’s polluted waterways, more than 950 Allegheny Aquatic Alliance volunteers have removed 360,857 pounds of garbage and 4,051 tires from the 50-mile creek, Handley said.

That includes 85,732 pounds and 4,051 tires from the 50-mile creek, Handley said.

“We are so proud of these results,” Handley said, “and are grateful to the community for supporting this important cause. This year marks our final stretch. With your help, we will clean up this precious waterway from its current deplorable state. The more volunteers we have, the more garbage we can remove.”

Volunteers assisting the Allegheny Aquatic Alliance clean a portion of the Connoquenessing Creek in North Sewickley Township in this August 2017 file photo. The Allegheny Aquatic Alliance is seeking volunteers to clean the final 10 miles of the creek, beginning in Ellwood City, in August and in September.

ABOUT THE CONNOQUENESSING CREEK

- **What**: The Connoquenessing Creek begins in Butler County, flows through Lawrence County and ends its 13-township meandering journey in Beaver County.
- **Why**: The Allegheny Aquatic Alliance’s annual cleanups are necessitated by illegal dumping and debris entering the waterway through flooding.
- **How much**: Expenses associated with the 2017 cleanup totaled $13,500, which included garbage disposal, recycling costs, volunteer liability insurance, celebration party food and beverages, portable toilets, promotion and advertising, volunteer T-shirts, boat repairs, mileage and printing services.

**Needs for Aug. 18 and Sept. 8**
- 100 leather work gloves
- 10 tarp
- 10 pry bars
- 10 old metal ladders
- 10 tin-cutters
- 10 floatation devices/life jackets
- 5 sledgehammers
- 4 portable toilets
- 3 rolls of orange field marking tape or colored electrical tape
- 3 washing stations
- 2 chainsaws
- Use of 20 aluminum/metal boats
- Use of 20 canoes
- Use of 15 pickup trucks or dump trucks, with or without winches
- Use of 3 brush cutters or weed eaters
- Use of 2 pressure washers
- Use of skid loader or Bobcat
- Use of trailers
- Chains
- Food and beverages
- Hip waders
- Portable winches
- Rope

See Creek, Page 5
Hope finds a home

Hope, From Page 1

time and her family was collecting $5 for rubber bracelets to help raise money for her trip to Boston for life-saving surgery and treatments,” Atkinson said.

“I knew there was no way I could send only $5.”

The special education teacher in the Ellwood City Area School District received approval from Lincoln High administrators to her request to found Club Hope, whose goal was to raise money for patients and families affected by a cancer diagnosis — such as her friend.

Since then, “We have raised over $70,000,” Atkinson said, “and helped so many patients and families in our area.”

“A very personal touch”

She and her husband, Jon, in February considered expanding Club Hope, and on June 9, The Club Hope Foundation opened at 237 Sixth St. in Ellwood City during a ribbon-cutting ceremony that included members of the Ellwood City Area Chamber of Commerce.

The nonprofit organization’s mission, Atkinson says, “is to provide encouragement, services and hope to patients and families affected by cancer.”

Atkinson and Club Hope Foundation volunteers will provide encouragement through flowers, edible arrangements, gift cards for gasoline or restaurants, cards and the like for those in cancer treatment or in recovery.

Club Hope’s services include meals, housecleaning, lawn care and other in-home efforts to help someone stay home with family longer or by purchasing a gift sought by the patient.

“Our foundation has a very personal touch,” Atkinson said. “Through hand-written cards and donations from us directly to someone, I believe has a huge impact on someone’s life. Knowing that one of the most difficult times that someone is thinking of them and fighting right along with them can be a game-changer in their treatments. We want all those faced with a diagnosis to live by our quote, which is to ‘Never give up. There is always hope.”

Chamber “an unbelievable group”

Her office at 237 Sixth St. is the physical manifestation and official culmination of an effort that began 10 years ago, after that troubling phone call.

“I have received so many wonderful thank yous from those we have helped,” Atkinson said.

Meet & Greet

- **Name:** Cara Atkinson
- **Age:** 33
- **Hometown:** Ellwood City
- **High school:** Lincoln High.
- **College:** Bachelor’s degrees in elementary education and special education, Slippery Rock University of Pennsylvania. Master’s degree in special education supervision, Slippery Rock University.
- **Employment:** Special education teacher in the Ellwood City Area School District. President and CEO of the Club Hope Foundation Inc.
- **Club Hope Foundation summer hours:** 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Monday through Friday. Evenings by appointment by calling 724-657-7672 or emailing clubhopefoundation@gmail.com.
- **Website:** www.clubhopefoundation.com
- **Club Hope Foundation location:** 237 Sixth St. Ellwood City, PA 16117
FOURSOME’S 122 TOPS CHAMBER FIELD, WINS GIFT CARD

Golf outing draws 88!

By William V. Foley
For The Chamber

ORTH SEWICKLEY TOWNSHIP – Ken Clifton, Tom Dore, John Potter and Paul Rezk shot a 122 for a three-stroke victory in the Ellwood City Area Chamber of Commerce’s 30th annual golf open June 25 at the Connoquenessing Country Club.

A foursome of Justin Bruce, Andrew Chiapusio, Mike Colella and Ryan Costello finished in second place with a 125 in a field of 22 four-person teams.

Clifton, Dore, Potter and Rezk received $100 in Connoquenessing Country Club golf shop credit, as did Howard Marshall, the winner of the chamber’s putting contest. Marshall also won the closest to the pin contest on No. 3 and received a $50 golf shop gift card.

Also receiving $50 Connoquenessing Country Club golf shop credits were Joe Jurinko, who won the closest to the pin contest on No. 7; Costello, who won the closest to the pin contest on No. 11; and Jim Bish, who won the closest to the pin contest on No. 13.

Costello won the longest drive on No. 6 and Kleia Porter, on No. 12. Each received a $50 Connoquenessing Country Club golf shop credit.

Meet the sponsors

Venezie Sporting Goods & Apparel was the tournament’s platinum sponsor; Giant Eagle, the breakfast sponsor; Lutz & Myers Contractors & Engineers, the lunch sponsor; Pete’s Uptown Beer & Beverage, the beverage sponsor; WesBanco Bank, the cart sponsor; Ellwood City Forge-Ellwood Group Inc., the dinner sponsor; Medevac, the putting green sponsor; and Freedom Healthcare Services, the golf sleeve sponsor.

Tee sponsors were Air Physical Therapy & Fitness; Al’s Corner; Amerikohl Aggregates; Armstrong; A.R. Oliastro Inc.; Beth Hazen Nationwide; Berkheimer Inc.; Butler County Community College; Carrie Young Farmers Insurance; and Culligan Water.

Also, Dimeo Olson Law Group; DoubleTree Hotel; DuBois Electric Storage; Ellwood City Forge, Ellwood Group Inc.; Ellwood City Hospital; Family Eye Care; Fratus Architectural Associates; Freedom Healthcare; and First National Bank of Pennsylvania.

Hope finds a home

Hope, From Page 3

“Over the years we have also received so many thank-you cards from patients and families that we have helped and I cry all the time reading through them.”

The Lincoln High club travels to Shady Side Hospital’s Cancer Unit at Christmastime and, Atkinson said, “people we have met there have contacted us after telling us about the impact our trip made on their lives.

“If I can bring hope to someone who needs it, my life is truly a success. I am so thankful for this opportunity and just so overwhelmed by what we are able to do because of the support we are receiving.”

That support includes the Ellwood City Area Chamber of Commerce, Atkinson said.

“What an unbelievable group to be a part of,” she said. “They do such a great job getting the word out about our events.

“We receive offers from local businesses through the chamber, and the events they put together or services they offer to help make a business successful are just amazing.”

Atkinson said she is grateful for the support Club Hope Foundation has received, and for the efforts of Raymond Santillo, the Ellwood City Area Chamber of Commerce’s executive director.

“His energy is contagious,” Atkinson said, “and he is such a great leader and does great things for our community.

Atkinson said she has learned that anything is possible “if you surround yourself with the right people, and man, have I.”

And her friend from Slippery Rock University, she said, is in remission and under a physician’s care.
Lauds, From Page 2

current deplorable state. The more volunteers we have, the more garbage we can remove,” Handley said.

Help is needed for cleansups scheduled for Aug. 18 and on Sept. 8.

“All volunteers will be provided with a T-shirt, lunch and an invitation to a celebration party that will feature food, drink and live music,” Handley said.

The success of the project requires tremendous support from the community, Handley said, adding that in addition to volunteers, the alliance needs the use of trucks, nonmotorized boats, shovels, winches, rope, chains, leather work gloves, small tractors, hip waders and good access to the Connoquenessing.

Volunteers are asked to meet at First Baptist Church of Ellwood City, 220 Fountain Ave., on Aug. 18. For more information or to contribute financially to the effort, contact Handley at 724-371-0416, email alleghenyaquaticalliance@hotmail.com or visit alleghenyaquaticalliance.com.
ELLWOOD CITY ARTS, CRAFTS, ENTERTAINMENT AND FOOD FESTIVAL

Ewing Park epicenter of fun

Families, friends, visitors flock to three-day event

By William V. Foley
For The Chamber

ELLWOOD CITY — Vendors from as far as Alabama, Florida, Maryland, New Hampshire, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Virginia and West Virginia were among the nearly 130 whose trinkets, crafts, jewelry, talents and foods fascinated crowds in Ewing Park during Ellwood City’s 38th Annual Arts, Crafts, Entertainment and Food Festival.

“I’ve been coming here for 50 years,” joked Ruth Hardy of Fombell, who held in one hand a street sign she purchased and personalized with her house number, and in her other, a pie created by Debbie’s Desserts, among the newest members of the Ellwood City Area Chamber of Commerce and which recently opened on Circle Way.

“Her hands are full,” said Hardy’s granddaughter, Ashley Nine, 25, of New Castle, “so now it is time to go.”

Nine’s hands were also full, one with a welcome sign she purchased, the other, with a boxed Debbie’s Desserts pie.

“This is the only festival that I go to, since I was tiny,” Nine said. “I come to buy crafts and food. We come for the pepperoni puffs.”

“I don’t mind standing in line”

Across the shaded Ewing Park, past monarch butterflies fluttering in a children’s tent, beyond the smell of onions and peppers frying in the Wolves Club shelter, around the face-painters and henna-tattoo artists, though the line of spectators viewing the opening and closing of wooden magic baskets, and through the wall of Italian-American music performed by D Major, was the line for those very pepperoni puffs, stretching 50 customers deep.

“I like the food, the pepperoni puffs,” said Rylea Heitzenrater, 14, of Ellwood City. “And I don’t mind standing in line.”

Volunteers with Holy Redeemer Parish, Ellwood City, made about 1,800 pepperoni puffs daily.

“My favorite is the pepperoni puffs,” said Mary Houk, 14, of Ellwood City.

“Pepperoni puffs,” added Jake Walker, 30, a 2006 graduate of Lincoln High who lives in Pittsburgh and traveled to Ellwood City to visit family.

Reese Williams, 10, right, of Ellwood City, views jewelry being sold by a vendor at the Ellwood City Arts, Crafts, Entertainment and Food Festival on June 29. At far left is her sister, Trinity Williams, 16, and at center, her cousin, Havana Williams, 17, both of Ellwood City.

A tall puppet makes its way through the crowd at the Ellwood City Arts, Crafts, Entertainment and Food Festival on June 29.
And to run in the 10K for fun,” he said.

The Ellwood City Ledger 10K Race, also in its 38th year, was held on July 3, among Ellwood City events held during the three-day festival and that included a Little Miss Firecracker pageant on Folino Stage in Ewing Park.

“I like the entertainment,” Houk said.

“We get to buy stuff here”

Crowds sat on shady benches and over three days enjoyed performances by the Riverside Jazz Club, D Major, Heart’s Desire, Dance Expressions, Nickle Plated Revolver, Brok’n Pik, Studio P Dancers, the Lincoln Blue Band Drum Crew, Allegheny Drifters, Civic Chorale, Nick Stelter, Elmo’s Fire, Sanctuary Jazz, Mars Stars Jump Rope Team, RML Jazz, Average Jane, Diamond Dance Academy Dancers, No Money Down, Let’s Groove Tonight and the Brighton Boys.

Grace Brown, 7, of New Brighton, and Sarah Bubb, 7, of Ellwood City, stood near Folino Stage, their new marionettes purchased from vendor Zhong Zhang, of Columbus, Ohio.

“I got a dog puppet,” Grace said. “Because I like dogs.”


Each had a dolphin painted on one cheek, a sunshine symbol on the other.

“We get to buy stuff here,” Sarah said, “and I like getting stuff. And getting my face painted.”

Lisa Antuono, of Ellwood City, reflects on the crowd in Ewing Park at the Ellwood City Arts, Crafts, Entertainment and Food Festival on June 30.

Duke and Susan Arkwright, of Mercer and former Ellwood City residents, have their caricature drawn by vendor Adam Walmsley in Ewing Park in Ellwood City at the Ellwood City Arts, Crafts, Entertainment and Food Festival on June 30.

Bill Viccari, drummer with D-Major, looks at lead guitarist Rob DiBuono during the band’s performance at the Ellwood City Arts, Crafts, Entertainment and Food Festival on June 29. Left: Tom Yoho, of the Ellwood City Wolves Club, fries peppers and onions for a steak sandwich on June 29.
Ewing Park epicenter of fun

A crowd meanders through vendors in Ewing Park at the Ellwood City Arts, Crafts, Entertainment and Food Festival on June 30.

Kaiden Davidson, 10, and his sister, Cierra Davidson, 10, show off their face paintings at the Ellwood City Arts, Crafts, Entertainment and Food Festival on June 29. Far right: Derek and Melissa Bozek, of Fombell, and daughter Hannah, 4, look at a Princesita's Magic Basket being shown by vendor Philippe Janvier on June 29.

Ally Coulter, 14, of Ellwood City, gets a henna tattoo created by vendor Dawn Gurtner at the Ellwood City Arts, Crafts, Entertainment and Food Festival on June 29. Far right: Lily Grimm, 7, of Ellwood City, takes photos of performers on Folino Stage while her mother, Becki, looks on in Ewing Park at the Ellwood City Arts, Crafts and Food Festival on June 30.