



Participants gather for a group photo at the 2019 Luau and Legends of Surfing Invitational.

27th Annual Luau and Legends of Surfing Invitational Set to Make Virtual Waves

Online fundraiser will benefit Moores Cancer Center at UC San Diego Health

For the first time ever, surfers, scientists, physicians and survivors will come together virtually to support the fight against cancer at the annual [Luau and Legends of Surfing Invitational](#) on Aug. 9.

As UC San Diego events are being canceled or postponed because of the coronavirus pandemic, the annual fundraiser has transitioned to a virtual format to allow participants to support the fight against cancer from home.

Instead of surfing the ocean, participants are invited to surf the wave of cancer research as they Crowdsurf for a Cure, helping raise money for research, education and clinical care. All proceeds from the 27th annual Luau and Legends of Surfing Invitational will benefit Moores Cancer Center at UC San Diego Health and contribute to the Campaign for UC San Diego.

“As we celebrate the 27th Luau and Legends of Surfing Invitational, it is inspiring to see the local community continue to support the breakthrough discoveries and life-saving treatment developed by Moores Cancer Center,” said Dr. Scott M. Lippman, director of Moores Cancer Center at UC San Diego Health. “While we cannot join together in person for this year’s event, cancer does not stop during the COVID-19 pandemic and neither does our commitment to finding new cures and treatments for this life-threatening disease. Thanks to the generous donations raised through the Luau, we can continue to provide our patients with the latest individualized treatment and excellence in patient care that is only available at an academic medical center like ours.”

The beloved fundraiser—which has traded tuxedos for wet suits and ballrooms for beach views since its founding in 1993—has brought in nearly \$10 million for research and helped thousands of cancer patients through clinical trials, new treatments and delivering discoveries. Now, amid nationwide pandemic-related disruptions to the health sector, support towards ending this devastating disease continues to be critical.

For myelofibrosis patient and advocate Sandra Dillon, this support made all the difference in her journey with cancer.

When doctors discovered a small lump behind Dillon’s ribcage in 2004—which turned out to be an enlarged spleen, a symptom of myelofibrosis—it came completely out of the blue. As a healthy 28-year-old, the last thing she expected was to be diagnosed with an extremely rare cancer with no real treatment options and a median survival rate of five to seven years.

“What I thought was my whole life ahead of me was now just a few years,” said Dillon, whose doctors tried to manage her symptoms as she slowly got sicker from the disease. “I had such a hard time with my diagnosis and my experience. Knowing that there was no treatment that could stop myelofibrosis, I just didn’t want to see doctors, be in a hospital or take any more tests. I kind of gave up on medicine in general and figured, ‘Well, I’ll just take the time that I’ve got left and that’s all I’ve got.’”

Several years later, the trajectory of Dillon’s life changed completely when she moved to San Diego and was introduced to the team at Moores Cancer Center. Ridden with fear and hesitancy, she made the courageous decision to continue to fight for her life with support from her friends and husband, Casey Turk.



Sandra Dillon and Casey Turk. Photo Courtesy of Sandra Dillon.

“What I found at Moores Cancer Center was the exact opposite of what I was expecting. I was greeted with so much compassion and care at every level,” said Dillon, who came to the center in 2011. “Initially, I was afraid of being a pin cushion and just a number passing through a system. Instead, I found a home. Moores Cancer Center is a shining light of what treatment and health care can, and should, look like.”



Dr. Catriona Jamieson

At Moores Cancer Center, Dillon met physician-scientist Dr. Catriona Jamieson, Deputy Director of Moores, who enrolled her in a clinical trial for a new drug called fedratinib designed to block cancer cell proliferation. The results were amazing—in a few months, Dillon was revitalized with newfound energy, less pain and a whole new life.

However, when the promising cancer drug was discarded for safety concerns and its trial pulled, Jamieson and her team were forced to turn to alternate trials and treatments to halt Dillon’s disease. With the health of multiple patients depleting in the absence of fedratinib, Jamieson worked tirelessly alongside scientist, biotech executive and Moores Cancer Center Board Vice Chair John Hood, who has a doctorate in medical physiology and led early research on the drug, to fight to bring it back. When fedratinib was finally approved by the FDA in 2019, it was the first new therapy approved for myelofibrosis in nearly a decade. It is now available under the brand name Inrebic.

“Now that I am on the drug, I haven’t had to have a blood transfusion in over a year. I feel incredible again,” said Dillon. “What Dr. Jamieson and Hood have accomplished is incredible—it’s a blessing for me and an amazing testament to what is possible.”

During the online fundraiser on Aug. 9, Jamieson and Hood will both be recognized with the Rell Sunn Award, which honors the memory of Rell Kapolioka’ehukai Sunn, known as the “First Lady of Surfing.” Sunn was diagnosed with breast cancer at the age of 32, but rather than submitting to the disease, she lived life to the fullest until passing 15 years later in 1998. The Rell Sunn Award recognizes individuals who have made a difference in the battle against cancer and who embody the Aloha spirit.



John Hood

“This event has had a sustainably positive impact on our relentless drive to deliver new discoveries to the clinic with alacrity, and our unique capacity at Moores Cancer Center to develop personalized cancer stem cell, immunotherapy, and precision-medicine-guided targeted therapies for hopeful

patients across economic strata,” said Jamieson. “To receive this award is such an extraordinary privilege considering that it honors Rell Sunn, a champion Hawaiian surfer who battled breast cancer and was the personification of hope, joy and the spirit of ‘ganbatte,’ which is the Japanese word for never, ever, ever, give up.”

“Being honored based on a person like Sunn, by your peers and neighbors, is incredible. I feel very grateful for it,” said Hood. “I hope what we did—facing down the FDA with a small group in the company and doing everything we can to get it to the patients—would make her proud.”

The virtual luau festivities kick off online on Aug. 9 at 5 p.m. Guests can expect to enjoy a program featuring: an address from Chancellor Pradeep K. Khosla, Vice Chancellor for Health Sciences Dr. David Brenner and CEO of UC San Diego Health Patty Maysent, messages from surf legends, Moores Cancer Center leaders, Polynesian dancers, live music and more. Attendees in the local region can also join in by pre-ordering a [Dinner and Drinks package](#)—a catered meal and cocktails with options to be picked up or delivered to their home to enjoy during the event. Featured artwork will be presented by Southern California surfer Andy Davis.

[The Luau and Legends of Surfing Invitational’s Crowdsurf for a Cure is free to register and to attend.](#) Event sponsors include: Cooley LLP; Lina and Christian Waage; Lisa and Mike Rhodes; Valerie Ewell Armstrong and Sam Armstrong; BioMed Realty; ASML; Arey Jones; The Allergan Foundation; and Pfizer. For more information about sponsorship opportunities and event activities, [visit the Luau and Legends of Surfing Invitational website](#). You can also get read more about the [Moores Cancer Center at UC San Diego Health](#).

Gifts made through the 27th annual Luau and Legends of Surfing Invitational’s Crowdsurf for a Cure also contribute to the Campaign for UC San Diego—a university-wide comprehensive fundraising effort concluding in 2022. Alongside UC San Diego’s philanthropic partners, the university is continuing its nontraditional path toward revolutionary ideas, unexpected answers, lifesaving discoveries and planet-changing impact. For more information, [visit campaign.ucsd.edu](https://campaign.ucsd.edu).

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