

LIFESAVING PARTNERSHIPS:

BASEBALL AND SUN SCREENING TEAM UP

By Cathy Clark

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Photography: Ray Reyes

“THE MOLE PATROL SAVED MY LIFE!” SAYS TAMPA ATTORNEY JEFFREY PEARSON

Pearson clearly recalls the day six years ago when he attended a Tampa Bay Rays spring training game in Port Charlotte.

“I had a freckle on my shoulder we had been following for a couple years. My family physician said I should have it checked out, but there was no urgency. It wasn’t raised; it wasn’t turning colors or anything like that,” Pearson said. “But the Mole Patrol was there, so I figured I’d have it checked out.”

The Mole Patrol® offers free skin cancer screening and education, traveling to venues around Florida, such as the spring training game that Pearson had attended that auspicious day with his wife and son. Spring Swing®, Moffitt’s Sun Safety Tour, is a partnership between Moffitt Cancer Center and the Tampa Bay Rays, offering free skin cancer screenings at specified baseball spring training venues throughout Florida. Screeners from Moffitt’s Mole Patrol team look for early signs of skin cancer while promoting sun safety, skin cancer awareness and education.

Immediately after Dr. Frank Glass, a dermatology specialist working with the Mole Patrol that day, took one look at his shoulder, Pearson knew something was wrong, especially when the other Mole Patrol volunteers started coming over “and they had that big magnifying glass!”

“Dr. Glass said, ‘Don’t procrastinate. Not next month; not next week!’” Pearson recalls.

So Pearson made an appointment with a local dermatologist in New Tampa where he had the mole surgically removed and biopsied. A short while later, “in the interest of caution,” Pearson had a follow-up surgery at Moffitt where more skin was removed.

“It was stage 2 melanoma,” says Pearson. “The fact that it was caught that early prevented all kinds of complications and a more invasive surgery.”

Pearson says it is a relief to be cancer free since the diagnosis and surgery six years ago. He makes sure to have regular skin checkups, and he frequently shares his motto: “Procrastination is cancer’s best friend!”

Now he also takes precautions to protect his skin, which include using sunscreen, wearing hats and avoiding the sun during the hours it can cause the most damage.

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is cancer’s best friend!”*

“Most skin damage occurs before age 20, and I remember spending summers on the New Jersey shore with nothing on my skin but baby oil,” says Pearson. This occurred at a time when people were less aware of the importance of taking precautions in the sun.

Through his experience he is personally aware of the importance of skin cancer prevention and education.

Pearson regularly advocates for routine skin checkups, sun safety precautions and education. He spoke at the 20-year anniversary for Mole Patrol and volunteers in other ways. “I’m happy to spread the word and do anything I can to get the word out.”

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His take on the importance of partnerships like Spring Swing? “It couldn’t be more important!” He adds, “Partnerships like this are essential because access to diagnostics and education is key to cancer prevention.”

Without such partnerships, it likely would have been another six or 12 months before Pearson had the freckle checked, “because I didn’t see any urgency – procrastination again – so having the Mole Patrol there and the Spring Swing and having the immediate ability and the ease of access to a dermatologist was crucial.”

The process to get his skin screened took only a few moments, and “I’m glad I did.”

“Get checked out!” he concludes. “Don’t wait! When it comes to cancer, time is not on your side.”



Pearson (R) and his son, Ryan, participated in a check presentation by the Rays in 2013 at Tropicana Field.



MOLE PATROL ID'S HUNDREDS OF SKIN CANCERS

The Mole Patrol skin cancer screening program travels to venues around Florida to offer free skin cancer screenings and cancer education to the public. In its 20 plus years of operation, the Mole Patrol has screened more than 15,000 Floridians, identifying hundreds of suspicious skin lesions that have resulted in the diagnosis of melanoma, basal and squamous cell cancers.

The Mole Patrol consists of medical doctors and midlevel practitioners who specialize in skin cancer and/or dermatology, as well as registered nurses and support staff. Most physicians, midlevel professionals and nurses are based at Moffitt, while others come from the USF Department of Dermatology and from affiliate institutions and practices in the community. If suspicious lesions are found, patients leave with follow-up recommendations that they should take to their primary care physician or dermatologist. In addition, participants receive educational information about skin cancer prevention and early detection and often receive free sunscreen samples and other related giveaways.