

COURAGE, LIFE & HOPE

# REFLECTIONS *of a journey*



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## Ron Zahrt

Ron Zahrt never really thought about his health until his sister, a registered nurse, suggested he get an annual physical when he turned 40.

“I look back now and that’s the thing that saved my life,” Zahrt said. “Having that information helped my doctor realize that something was wrong.”

The problem turned out to be colon cancer, which was discovered by a simple screening that many people choose not to complete. Zahrt takes issue with people who avoid the screenings just because some of the tests are uncomfortable or require them to miss a day of work.

“Cancer is an ugly, ugly thing, but there’s a way to avoid it and it’s a simple way: Get a screening,” he said. “Giving a day of your life to save the rest of it is an awfully cheap price to pay.”

Zahrt was lucky. Doctors caught the disease early and the treatment they prescribed was successful. Radiation and chemotherapy knocked out the cancer and caused almost no negative side effects.

“I never got sick, I never lost my hair,” he said. “I was just absolutely blessed. Other than the fact that I was scared to death, I really tolerated it well.”

But Zahrt knows the result could have been much worse. Colorectal

cancer takes more than 55,000 American lives each year. It is the nation’s second-leading cancer killer, behind only lung cancer. Yet many colorectal cancer deaths could be avoided if the disease were detected early.

Since his experience with cancer, Zahrt has adopted fresh priorities.

“It absolutely reordered my life,” he said. “You value the day, you value your family and your community.

I understand now that I was left here for a reason.”

One of the causes Zahrt now champions is regular colorectal cancer screenings. Having a regular colonoscopy is vital because early stage colorectal cancer has no symptoms. But screening can reveal polyps, which are small growths in the colon that can become cancerous. Removing

polyps early can prevent the disease. For people who already have the disease, there still is hope. Early detection greatly increases the chance for a cure.

Doctors recommend that men and women get screened for colorectal cancer at age 50. People with a family history of the disease should consider the screenings at age 40.

“People need to be tested,” Zahrt said. “What I had easily could have been avoided.”

