

Support and Advocacy

The Life Raft Group helps others understand the gist of GIST disease

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The Life Raft Group (LRG), a non-profit organization located in Wayne, says it has a simple focus: to cure gastro-intestinal stromal tumor cancer and help those living with it until then. It is estimated that anywhere between 3,000 and 5,000 people develop GIST each year and this group works toward bringing awareness and support to patients and families suffering from GIST disease.

Started in 2000 by a handful of patients who had begun sharing their experiences online, LRG was incorporated in 2002 under the leadership of founding member and Executive Director Norman Scherzer, whose wife suffers from the illness. "Our mission is to ensure the survival of GIST patients through a comprehensive approach by connecting individual patients' needs, the worldwide community of GIST advocates and the global health and research environment," explains Erin Kristoff, Director of Marketing and Communications. "To achieve this, we focus on three key areas: patient support and education, advocacy and research," she notes. Education and support are provided to patients via one-on-one counseling and group meetings.

An active presence in the cancer community, LRG is changing how people live and look at GIST, evolving advocacy roles, empowering patients and leading the way in research. "We fund and manage coordinated research initiatives that keep the needs of the GIST patient foremost. LRG is the only GIST advocacy organization with a dedicated research initiative led by a team of world-renowned scientists and clinicians," states Kristoff.



SAILING TOWARD A SOLUTION The Life Raft Group staff, under the direction of Executive Director Norman Scherzer (second from the right), issued a GIST Awareness Day challenge to break the Guinness World Record for the largest display of origami boats. To date, they exceeded their goal of 20,000 and are currently storing more than 100,000 boats in their offices.



Throughout the year the Life Raft Group sponsors numerous fundraising events. Two of their most successful are yearly poker tournaments held in New York City and Las Vegas. "We are very proud of our GIST Awareness Day origami campaign," Kristoff adds. "Last summer we also launched the Rare 13 campaign to draw attention to the fact that 13 people are diagnosed with GIST every day," she says. To learn more about GIST disease and ways to volunteer or donate, visit liferaftgroup.org or call 973-837-9092. ■

