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Long Beach Island Resident David Caldarella Honored with National Survivorship Award

CRANBURY, NJ – Five years ago, while he was in the midst of battling stage IV head and neck cancer, David Caldarella of Long Beach Island, NJ, didn't dare dream of the future let alone winning a national award. But today, thanks to his skilled medical team and a few thousand of his friends and supporters, that national award is a reality and Caldarella's future is looking brighter than ever.

On October 3, 2015, Caldarella accepted the inaugural Hero of Hope™ award before 700 oncology nurse and patient navigators at the Academy of Oncology Nurse & Patient Navigator's® (AONN+) Sixth Annual Conference in Atlanta.

The Hero of Hope™ award was established by *CONQUER: the patient voice™* magazine in partnership with AONN+ as a means of recognizing a person living with cancer who is making an outstanding contribution to his/her community through fundraising or leadership, by serving as a role model to others with cancer, and exuding extraordinary spirit, grace and optimism in the face of adversity.

Caldarella was one of four nominees who were selected to be entered into the final voting round, which took place online between August and September. More than 50 submissions were received for this honor and nominees represented all regions of the U.S.

In addition to having their stories appear in the August print issue of *CONQUER™* magazine, the four finalists were featured in video profiles that were posted on the publication's website (conquer-magazine.com). Their travel and lodging expenses while in Atlanta were also covered.

More than 10,000 votes were cast over the two-month period with Caldarella, founder of David's Dream & Believe Cancer Foundation, capturing the most. As the winner of the 2015 Hero of Hope™ award, he received a plaque recognizing his contribution to the cancer community and a donation of \$1,000 to the charity of his choice in his name.

"This whole experience has been great," says Caldarella. "Just the nomination alone adds a layer of credibility to all the work that David's Dream & Believe is doing. I hope that this award and the contacts I've made through this conference open doors that will allow us to make an even greater impact on those we serve in New Jersey."

An undeniably humble man, Caldarella is quick to acknowledge his fellow nominees. "The winner really could have been any of us," he shares. "There were three other people in this contest who are just as deserving and whose stories are just as impactful."

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Caldarella was just 41 when he was diagnosed with an extremely aggressive form of cancer. After enduring multiple surgeries including a tonsillectomy and biopsy, a right neck dissection and transoral robotic surgery to remove his remaining tonsil and tumor, Caldarella received chemotherapy and radiation.

“I was in the best shape of my life and had never smoked,” Caldarella explains. “Beyond the physical, this experience hit me emotionally, socially, and financially. It literally changed my life.”

He received the all clear from his surgeon, David Cagnetti, MD, FACS, Co-Director of the Jefferson Center for Head and Neck Surgery at Thomas Jefferson University Hospital, Philadelphia, eight months later in November 2010.

Caldarella explains that throughout his treatment he would spend hours contemplating how he could use this experience to make a difference in the lives of others. The result of that effort was David’s Dream & Believe Cancer Foundation, a nonprofit organization which provides financial assistance, services and hope to people in New Jersey who are battling cancer and can’t afford day-to-day necessities.

The foundation hosts four fundraising events each year – including a gala which this year raised a record \$100 K – and to date has helped 421 families by providing more than \$400 K in assistance. To read Caldarella’s story in full visit: <https://conquer-magazine.com/about/heroes-of-hope/meet-the-nominees/#David>. To learn more about David’s Dream & Believe Cancer Foundation visit: <http://davidsdreamandbelieve.org/>.

***Photo captions to follow on final page of document.*

About the Academy of Oncology Nurse & Patient Navigators® (www.aonnonline.org)

The Academy of Oncology Nurse & Patient Navigators, Inc. (AONN+) is the largest national specialty organization dedicated to improving patient care and quality of life by defining, enhancing, and promoting the role of oncology nurse and patient navigators. The organization, which has more than 5,000 members, was founded in 2009 to provide a network for all professionals involved and interested in patient navigation and survivorship care services in order to better manage the complexities of the cancer treatment process.

CONQUER: The Patient Voice Magazine™ (www.conquer-magazine.com) is the Academy of Oncology Nurse & Patient Navigators’ (AONN+) premier forum for patients with cancer. CONQUER features articles written by and for patients with cancer, survivors, nurse navigators, and other oncology team members. This magazine addresses the issues that patients, their family members, and caregivers face every day in an easy-to-read format. Issues include interviews with patients with cancer, information on access to care, and articles on lifestyle topics such as nutrition, stress management, personal finance, and legal and employer issues. CONQUER also features patient stories that are nominated for the AONN+ HERO OF HOPE™ award, which will be presented at the AONN+ Annual Conference. All stories are compiled in a special issue of CONQUER at the end of the year.

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Photo Captions:

Nominees: (from left) The four finalists of the 2015 Hero of Hope™ competition include Bonnie Addario of San Carlos, Ca. (represented in this photo by David LeDuc of Wisconsin); Susan Leighton of Huntsville, Ala.; Paul Karppinen of Charleston, SC; and David Caldarella of Long Beach Island, NJ.

Winner: Upon being announced the winner of the 2015 Hero of Hope™ survivorship award, David Caldarella of Long Beach Island, NJ, receives a hug from Lillie D. Shockney, RN, BS, MAS, Program Director and Co-Founder of AONN+.

Hero of Hope: The winner of the 2015 Hero of Hope™ survivorship award is David Caldarella of Long Beach Island, NJ (center). Pictured with Sharon Gentry, RN, MSN, AOCN, CBCN, AONN+ Leadership Council (left) and Lillie D. Shockney, RN, BS, MAS, Program Director and Co-Founder of AONN+ (right).