Ann Kostal considers herself fortunate to have had a terrible bout of the flu and pneumonia in November 2013. If she hadn’t been so sick, she might not have found out she had lung cancer when it was treatable and beatable.

Despite having received her pneumonia and flu vaccines, Kostal got the flu and was so sick that she had to have someone else drive her to the doctor. As part of her medical examination, a chest X-ray revealed a spot on her lung. Two rounds of antibiotics, a second X-ray and a CT scan followed by a PET-CT scan revealed that the spot was worrisome for cancer.

Kostal, now 66, said she was shocked. Yes, she’d smoked casually as a teen-ager because it was the “cool thing to do.” Her father had developed skin cancer, and her mother died of acute myeloid leukemia. But lung cancer? No one in her family had ever had lung cancer.

“After I got over the initial shock, I said to myself, ‘Well, it’s in there. Let’s get it out,’” she said.

Kenneth Saum, MD, cardiothoracic surgeon with Centra Medical Group Alan B. Pearson Regional Cancer Center used a minimally invasive surgical technique to remove the middle lobe on the right side of Kostal’s lung on April 14, 2014, at Centra Lynchburg General Hospital. She returned home two days after surgery, with no need for further treatment.

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Beating lung cancer from page 1

“I had coughed from November to April,” said Kostal. “I woke up from surgery and the cough was gone.”

The Lynchburg resident has had follow-up visits at the Centra Alan B. Pearson Regional Cancer Center with Aimee Strong, thoracic nurse practitioner. “I’ve had scans every four months since the surgery,” Kostal said. “I’ve done so well that I won’t go again until April and then not for another year.

“I can’t say enough good things about the group at the cancer center,” she continued. “We took my mom there when she was sick. It’s a top-notch place. Everyone is kind and understanding. They don’t rush you. It’s as if you are the only patient they have.”

Kostal, who retired in 2002 after 34 years in admissions and records at Central Virginia Community College, is back working part-time in the purchasing department. When she isn’t working, she’s traveling – she just returned from Panama and is off to Hawaii in May.

“I really believe this was a very simple thing,” said Kostal of her lung cancer. “The way it happened could not have been better. If I had not had pneumonia, I wouldn’t have known I had cancer. We did something about it, and now I’m well.”

Centra Alan B. Pearson Regional Cancer Center offers lung cancer screening for people at high risk for developing lung cancer. For more information, call 434.200.3100.

Sing for Spring!

The Centra Alan B. Pearson Regional Cancer Center celebrates cancer services’ Musical Month of March by hosting a broad range of musicians and musical groups. To participate, please contact Anita Lowe at anita.lowe@centrahealth.com.
Cancer patient grateful for care, kindness and expertise

Berkey Vicks began volunteering at the Centra Alan B. Pearson Regional Cancer Center after her husband was successfully treated for lymphoma.

“It was such a nice place, with such caring people, that I wanted to give back—never thinking that I would be a patient there,” said the 69-year-old Campbell County resident who was diagnosed with breast cancer last year. “I was very active and physically fit, and I’m a bit of a health nut. There is absolutely no history of breast cancer in my family, so it was a real shock to learn I had breast cancer. Year after year, my mammogram was normal, until it wasn’t.”

Vicks’ cancer was diagnosed in the fall of 2015 during a routine mammogram and follow-up biopsies. She underwent a mastectomy in February, followed by six sessions of chemotherapy and is continuing with targeted therapy every three weeks through next March.

“This journey has been like being on a roller coaster. It’s scary, fast and there’s no getting off,” she said. “But I’m feeling much better now, and I can’t seem to get enough exercise. Last week, we biked 14 miles, twice.”

Vicks took a leave from volunteering during her treatment, but is back greeting people in the cancer center foyer, helping with inventory in the Image Recovery Center and stuffing bags for health fairs.

Preferring to “stay in the background,” she calls her volunteer efforts “insignificant” in comparison to the volunteers who sew T-shirts with zippers to ease access to patients’ ports, make hats, play music, and comfort patients with warm blankets. “The people I’ve met at the cancer center have been a real inspiration to me,” she said. “Other volunteers who have been through the cancer experience have been so supportive. I expect that my role as a volunteer will change now that I have seen the other side.”

“I particularly admire the philosophy of Bill Gorman, retired director of Centra Bridges Residential Treatment Center, who volunteers at the cancer center. People coming to the center have a lot on their minds. Bill wants to brighten their day—even if it’s just a bit. He’ll wear cute bowties and straw hats. If people have their head hanging down, he’ll greet them and repeat ‘good morning’ until they look up and smile.”

She added “All the volunteers are so kind at the Pearson Cancer Center.”

Vicks said when she was diagnosed with breast cancer, she considered getting a second opinion elsewhere, but “once we evaluated the expertise of the panel of physicians, the awards Centra has won, and experienced the care of the nurse navigators who follow your treatment and answer your questions, we decided to stay right here.”

Vicks also said she is grateful for the comprehensive rehabilitation services she received through Centra’s Renew Program. The Centra program helps cancer survivors at any stage of cancer or phase of recovery manage their health through their treatment and recovery process.

“The physical therapist gave me exercises to help the range of motion in my arm, taught me how to massage the scar to prevent adhesion and checked for lymphedema,” Vicks said. “The program is so much more than exercise. Physical therapists inspected my incisions, performed lymphedema taping techniques and helped with my back spasms following surgery. They were an extra set of eyes and helped me between my appointments with my doctor.”

“After the strong part of chemotherapy was over, I began having aches in my knee and foot. Rehab staff members determined it was chemically induced after which I had eight sessions of land and water physical therapy. I haven’t had the pain since, and the therapy allowed me and motivated me to get moving again. I am so impressed with the rehabilitation program, and I have encouraged other cancer patients to take advantage of it.”

“We feel fortunate to live in central Virginia—the cancer center, the physicians and nurses, the rehabilitation program—we’re very lucky to have Centra right here.”

Participation in Centra’s Renew Program requires a physician referral. Most insurance companies including Medicare cover oncology rehabilitation. Nine Centra locations offer the Renew Program, four of which are in Lynchburg with other sites in Bedford, Gretna, Danville, Farmville and Keysville. For more information, call 434.200.6053 or visit rehab.centrahealth.com.

To volunteer at the Centra Alan B. Pearson Regional Cancer Center, contact Anita Lowe, 434.200.6093, or anita.lowe@centrahealth.com.
Free tai chi classes at cancer center

Free tai chi classes taught by one of the world’s grandmasters of martial arts and holistic healing traditions are being offered at the Centra Alan B. Pearson Regional Cancer Center, thanks to a partnership between Centra and the Jamerson Family YMCA.

Tai chi, an ancient Chinese martial art, is a “moving meditation” in which slow, circular movements are practiced mindfully with a focus on the internal experience. Class participants focus on deep breathing and precise postures that flow together and help relax the mind and strengthen the body.

“The calming effect of tai chi is very beneficial to cancer patients because of its mind and body connection,” said Paula Dahl, group fitness director at the Jamerson Family YMCA. “Its meditation-in-motion qualities promote serenity and help relieve the stress associated with cancer treatments.”

Recent research has indicated that tai chi has been found to help improve cancer patients’ and survivors’ quality of life by enhancing the immune system and relieving pain, anxiety and stress. Dahl added that studies have shown that tai chi improves balance, coordination, flexibility and mental focus and decreases blood pressure, pain, stiffness and risk for depression.

The class is part of an expanding partnership between Centra and the local YMCA, noted Corey Jeffcoat, branch manager of the Jamerson Family YMCA.

“Our focus is healthy living, youth development and social responsibility, and we believe this class is an ideal activity to bring to the cancer center,” he said.

The instructor, Grand Master Jesse Teasley, has 39 years of experience with China’s great masters, with a background in Chinese and Japanese martial arts and Chinese medicine. He returned to the United States in 1995 to continue his work in the field of Complementary Alternative Medicine and in 1998. Currently living in Lynchburg, he is a motivational speaker and a teacher of holistic wellness worldwide.

Grand Master Teasley, who also teaches land- and water-based classes at the Jamerson Family YMCA, “empowers participants to do the best that they can do,” said Dahl. “At the end of each class, he plays the flute to provide an even greater sense of calm and time for meditation.”

The tai chi classes, which are open to the public, are offered at the Centra Alan B. Pearson Regional Cancer Center every other Monday from 5 to 6 p.m. For more information or to register, call 434.200.6093.
Risk factors for breast cancer in young women

Most breast cancers are found in women who are 50 years old or older, but breast cancer also affects younger women. About 11 percent of all new cases of breast cancer in the United States are found in women younger than 45 years of age. While breast cancer diagnosis and treatment are difficult for women of any age, young survivors may find it overwhelming.

The Centers for Disease Control's Division of Cancer Prevention and Control is working to increase awareness of breast cancer and improve the health and quality of life of young breast cancer survivors and young women who are at higher risk of getting breast cancer.

Some young women are at a higher risk for getting breast cancer at an early age compared with other women their age. If you are a woman under age 45, you may have a higher risk if:

- You have close relatives (parents, siblings, or children) who were diagnosed with breast or ovarian cancer when they were younger than 45, especially if more than one relative was diagnosed or if a male relative had breast cancer.
- You have changes in certain breast cancer genes (BRCA1 and BRCA2), or have close relatives with these changes.
- You have an Ashkenazi Jewish heritage.
- You were treated with radiation therapy to the breast or chest during childhood or early adulthood.
- You have had breast cancer or certain other breast health problems such as lobular carcinoma in situ (LCIS), ductal carcinoma in situ (DCIS), atypical ductal hyperplasia, or atypical lobular hyperplasia.
- You have been told that you have dense breasts on a mammogram.

For more information on breast cancer:
Visit www.cancer.org or www.cdc.gov
Trees of Hope open house December 11 from 1-5 p.m.

Please join us this year as we celebrate the holiday season and lift the spirits of those visiting the Centra Alan B. Pearson Regional Cancer Center. Trees of Hope will be available for viewing between 9 a.m. and 6 p.m. November 17 to December 11.

An open house celebration will be held from 1 to 5 p.m. on Sunday, December 11. Come enjoy holiday music, light refreshments and a Christmas photo booth. There will be a silent auction of the trees, wreaths, centerpieces and cakes. The silent auction of the trees will run from November 17 to December 11. You may pick up your bidding number at the information desk, Image Recovery Center or the administration office of the cancer center. The bidding ends on December 11 at the open house.

Proceeds from the Trees of Hope benefit the Cancer Patient Support Fund, which assists area patients in need of immediate financial help during one of the most uncertain times in their lives. The community-based fund is supported by the Centra Foundation.