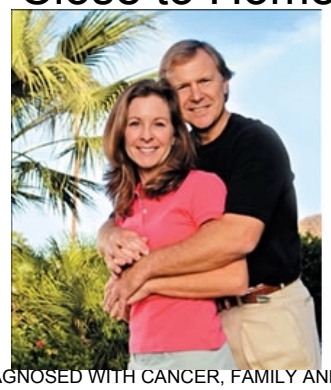
Close to Home



WHEN MICHAEL AND STEPHANIE LANDES WERE EACH DIAGNOSED WITH CANCER, FAMILY AND FRIENDS — AND EISENHOWER — HELPED THEM TRIUMPH

Not a disease typically associated with youth, cancer is always a shocking diagnosis, and more unusual in younger people. For Michael and Stephanie Landes, the shock was more disturbing, with each of them diagnosed with cancer — prostate cancer in Michael's case, and breast cancer in Stephanie's — within three months of each other.

Married for 19 years and parents to three children still at home,Michael and Stephanie Landes reeled with the news. *"It's a shocking realization to learn you have cancer,"* recalls Michael. *"You think, 'My life is on the line. It may end sooner than I ever imagined.'"*

The opening of the Eisenhower Lucy Curci Cancer Center in February 2004 was a thrilling time for Michael in his role as President of the Eisenhower Medical Center Foundation. He had helped with the fundraising for the new $65 million Center, and had helped organize the day's presentations and event. The Center's namesake, the late John Curci, the Curci family, elected officials and dignitaries gathered for the dedication ceremony and the official ribbon cutting; the elegant festivities culminated in a tour of the magnificent Eisenhower Lucy Curci Cancer Center. *"This is so incredibly beautiful,"* Stephanie turned to Michael during the tour. *"If I ever had cancer, this is where I would want to be."*

Eight months later Michael Landes was meeting with G. Aubrey Serfling, President and Chief Executive Officer of Eisenhower Medical Center, and Harry M. Goldstein, Chairman of the Board. The phone rang. Michael took the call, hung up, and said…*"I have prostate cancer." "I was fortunate to be in the room with two people I believe in,"* recalls Landes, *"to draw comfort from their responses as a balance to my shock. They said I would beat it. And, I believed them."*

"Ironically, this all started when I had just finished the marketing plan for the new Arnold Palmer Prostate Center. My allergist, Dr. Sam Weiss, called and told me I had a high PSA [prostate specific antigen] count. He was concerned. I told him I felt great," reflects Michael. *"He told me to see a urologist. A month later, Dr.Weiss checked on me, and I had done nothing. Another month went by.When he realized I wasn't serious about the PSA results, Dr.Weiss pushed me to immediately see Dr.Marvin Brooks, a urologist on staff at Eisenhower."*

Marvin Brooks, MD, performed a biopsy and found a small tumor in one lobe of the prostate. *"I felt like the biblical Peter…I was in total denial,"* Michael admits. *"Thank God, I had Dr.Weiss and Dr. Brooks who truly understood and cared enough to force me to take action."*

"Once you hear the word 'cancer', the first thing you want to do is find the very best care possible," Landes shares. *"I went to medical centers with national reputations looking for the very best, and believe it or not, all roads led me back to Eisenhower."* What Michael learned from physician recommendations and personal research was that Eisenhower's own John Stevenson, MD,Medical Director of the Arnold Palmer Prostate Center, was leading one of the most cutting edge brachytherapy (radiation seed implant) practices in the United States. Dr. Stevenson had helped found the brachytherapy practice at the University of California, Los Angeles, before coming to Eisenhower Medical Center. *"It was so overwhelming,"* Landes remembers, *"to have helped raise money for the Cancer Center, to meet Arnie and talk to him about his prostate cancer, and then to find myself one of the Arnold Palmer Prostate Center's first patients receiving brachytherapy."*

Age, as with other diseases, typically increases the risk of cancer. Rare in a man as young as Michael, who was 47 when diagnosed, prostate cancer is diagnosed in only one in 2,500 men by the age of 45. By the age of 50, one in 476 men are diagnosed with prostate cancer; however, over a man's lifetime, statistics show a one in six, or 16.7 percent, risk of being diagnosed with prostate cancer.

"In our last Christmas letter to our friends, Michael and I shared how our faith carried us through this and the lesson about early detection, getting your PSA checked, getting a mammogram," says Stephanie. "And many of our friends responded telling us they were on their way to the doctor!" "It was a blessing that I could receive treatment so close to home. My family is everything to me."

—Stephanie Landes

Breast cancer is also more common as women age. Only one woman in 69 is diagnosed with breast cancer at age 40, a number that drops to one in 38 women by the age of 50. The overall risk of a woman being diagnosed with breast cancer in her lifetime is 12.7 percent, or one in eight.

Stephanie Landes was just 48 when she discovered that she had breast cancer. *"Stephanie's breast cancer was detected early,"* explains Monica Khanna, MD, one of Eisenhower Medical Center's Radiation Oncologists. *"Stephanie first had a mammogram, an ultrasound, and then, an MRI. Dense breasts, commonly found in younger women, are more difficult to diagnose with mammography, and often require additional tests."* When the MRI confirmed a suspicious mass, Stephanie underwent a biopsy.

Within just weeks of Michael's brachytherapy procedure, Stephanie received a call. It was a friend, Brian Herman, MD,Medical Director of the Eisenhower Imaging Center and a Specialist in Neurointerventional Radiology. *"We have the results from your biopsy.Would you like to come in and meet with me?"* Dr. Herman asked. Anxious, but not waiting for a face to face meeting, Stephanie asked to know the results right away, over the phone. *"The biopsy is positive for breast cancer." "You know,"* Stephanie explains, *"your life changes the moment you learn you have cancer."*

After studying every option, Stephanie decided to have a lumpectomy, followed by six and one-half weeks of radiation therapy. The very first of her total of 33 treatments at the Eisenhower Lucy Curci Cancer Center put her at ease. *"From the moment I walked into the Eisenhower Lucy Curci Cancer Center, I was greeted by warm, friendly staff who really cared about me. The Center's ambience is so positive and relaxing — not sterile and cold,"* shares Stephanie. *"During my treatments, there was always music playing, a warm blanket, and almost no waiting time. The wonderful staff even talked to our three children to make sure they didn't have any fears or concerns that they weren't voicing."*

"There is no replacement for early detection," emphasizes Stephanie. *"If it wasn't for Eisenhower Medical Center's early detection, we might not be here right now.Michael and I owe our lives to our doctors and Eisenhower's state-of-the-art technology."*

"Stephanie's cancer was stage one, which means we detected it very early — at only .8 centimeters," explains Dr. Khanna. *"Eisenhower is one of only two locations in the Coachella Valley that offers digital mammography. Only eight percent of the centers in the country have digital mammography, which has been proven to be far superior to film mammography. In fact, The New England Journal of Medicine recently published research conclusively stating that digital mammography is significantly better than conventional film mammography at detecting breast cancer in young women."*

"I think about how grateful we are to have Eisenhower — it's been so good to my parents and grandparents — none of us has to travel out of the Valley for cutting edge treatment," Stephanie reflects. *"It was important to both of us that our children and family could see me daily and know that I was fine…and that I would be cured. It was a blessing that I could receive treatment so close to home. My family is everything to me."*

"There was a moment," Michael smiles, *"when our three children looked at us, and said, 'We know you love each other, and like to do things together…but this is ridiculous.'"*

Thanks to Eisenhower, they have their parents who have their whole lives ahead of them.

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