Cvikota mans up for prostate health

Hinsdale’s Tom Cvikota is proud that a group of local residents were instrumental in establishing the nation’s first prostate cancer support group 27 years ago.

“US TOO was founded by some dads in Hinsdale,” Cvikota said of the organization, for whom he’s served as a board member since 2013. “The notion was that women have all these health organizations. They asked ‘What about us, too?’ It sort of grew organically from that.”

Today, Us TOO has international reach, providing comprehensive educational materials and resources along with services that include more than 200 volunteer-led support groups across the U.S. and abroad.

Approximately 27,000 men die every year from prostate cancer, making it the second largest cancer killer of men following lung cancer. But it doesn’t have to be, according to experts, who say if more men discovered the disease earlier through testing, the number would plummet.

This past Tuesday, as a way to mark his fourth and final year on US TOO’s board, Cvikota, 63, organized Dine Out for Dads in observation of June’s designation as Men’s Health Month. He said the aim is to deliver prostate cancer information to men before they enter the 50-and-older demographic and its elevated risk factor.

“We’ve noticed with research that younger and younger men are finding that their PSA (prostate-specific antigen) and their Gleason scores are creeping up,” he said.

On Sept. 10, US Too is sponsoring the S.E.A. BLUE walk/run in Chicago’s Lincoln Park neighborhood for prostate cancer. It was at a S.E.A. BLUE event in 2012 where Cvikota was first touched by the spirit of camaraderie and support he witnessed among those on the cancer journey.

“I noticed the enormous emotional toll of people who are suffering, and when people came to this event they were doing it as a marker of their involvement with the organization and with the disease,” said Cvikota, who had been enlisted by friend earlier in the year to help coordinate an US TOO fundraiser.

He was granted special dispensation to sit on the organization’s board since he was not a prostate cancer survivor as bylaws required. Now he’s more conversant in prostate science then he ever could have imagined. Cvikota also appreciates the way loved ones can help men take ownership of their health.

“It’s always set up to be a family thing. We find the biggest advocates are the wives,” he said.

An art dealer and publisher by profession, Cvikota maintains a gallery in Chicago. After extended stints in New York City and San Francisco, Cvikota and his wife, both Chicago-area natives, and their two kids moved back to their cherished Midwest.

“All of (my wife’s) sisters and the kids’ grandparents and aunts and uncles were all back here,” he said.

And Hinsdale has met all their needs.

“We made friends right away. We have block parties all the time. It’s a really wonderful community.” — by Ken Knutson