

GUEST COLUMN

Mitch Henck: Greg Gard's father, Glen, was a man of his community

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"He would always be there to help neighbors and support local businesses," Gard says.

Growing up in tiny Cobb in southwestern Wisconsin, Glen Gard would work the family farm early mornings and evenings and then as a farm loan officer during the weekdays for decades.

"He was always helping other people," says Greg Gard, now head coach of the University of Wisconsin men's basketball team in Madison. "He would rather pay 3 cents a gallon more for gas in town than save money 25 miles away."

In October of 2015, Glen Gard lost his battle with a virulent strain of brain cancer after a turbulent six months of fighting it.

Greg Gard kept fighting. After years of helping former UW men's coach Bo Ryan with Coaches vs. Cancer, Gard decided to take the next step. Honoring his father, Gard started a new journey to raise money to fight cancer and have all of the money stay in Wisconsin.

In the spring of 2016, "Garding Against Cancer was born," Gard says. "If you pay state taxes in Wisconsin, you don't want the money to fix roads in Idaho."

Next Saturday night, Gard will host the [Second Annual Garding Against Cancer Signature Event](#) at the Kohl Center. From last year's event and various statewide functions over the past 16 months, Gard and his team have raised more than \$1.3 million.

More than 90 percent of the money goes to research at the UW Carbone Center or to patient care throughout the state, according to Gard. He added that if donors want their money to support research in pancreatic cancer, the organization can make sure that happens.

Garding Against Cancer has teamed up with UW Health, the UW Foundation, the UW Carbone Center and the UW Alumni Foundation for support.

Greg's wife, Michelle, also is passionate about the cause.

"We had a lot of options in our own fight," Michelle Gard says, "But we thought, 'What do other people do if they can't afford it?'"

After holding a Garding Against Cancer event at UW-Stout, the Gards learned some elderly people in the area were choosing between cancer meds and groceries. That's why money is targeted to patient needs when clinical trials are not readily available.

Garding Against Cancer doesn't spend much on overhead, according to Michelle Gard. The primary expense is food at larger events. Otherwise, businesses and families donate beverages and spaces for events, and discount printing costs.

Cancer patients all over the world reach out to Greg Gard for help. He has met with people in Australia when the basketball team was there last summer. He spoke to a woman who was a UW grad, fighting cancer in New York last year while the team was playing in Madison Square Garden.

In fact, the Badgers' head coach has visited cancer patients in their homes, holding their hands during hospice care. It's personal for Greg Gard. He was brought up by his parents to care about others.

I reminded the coach about George Bailey, the building and loan banker, in the movie "It's a Wonderful Life." Gard's father was a farm loan officer similar to the job of George, played by Jimmy Stewart in the film.

I asked Gard if his father would have spent the \$2,000 for his honeymoon on people in need like in the movie.

"Yeah, he would have," Gard replied.

So instead of Bedford Falls, there is Cobb, Wisconsin. Instead of George Bailey, there was Glen Gard. Now we have his son, and he is building big things in real life.

Gard's eyes light up when he talks about [Bucky on Parade](#). Eighty-five life size Bucky Badgers, crafted by artists (including one by State Journal cartoonist Phil Hands), will be unveiled May 7 all over the city and Dane County. They will either be purchased outright or sold at auction in September.

A portion of the money goes to Garding Against Cancer. If you want to join this wonderful cause, go to [GardingAgainstCancer.org](#) or [BuckyOnParade.com](#). For coach Gard and the fight against cancer, we can all remember from "It's a Wonderful Life" when George Bailey's daughter Zuzu said, "Every time a bell rings, somebody gets their wings."

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