

## TAKING AGGRESSIVE STEPS TO MOVE RESEARCH FORWARD

### “Hoag Challenge” builds a culture of philanthropy



*Mikey Hoag (right) and her mother, Patricia.*

Mikey Hoag describes her father’s battle with Alzheimer’s disease as a “long, horrible road” that drained the emotions of her entire family. Watching her father, a financial executive, fight and succumb to the disease inspired her to take action — both to honor his memory and to improve the lives of those diagnosed with Alzheimer’s. Mikey found a channel for her efforts in the Alzheimer’s Association Zenith Society, an influential group of donors who help drive the pace and direction of Alzheimer research and care.

Until his diagnosis, Mikey’s father, Vincent Murphy, lived a version of the American dream. Raised by a single mother during the Great Depression, he spent most of his childhood living in a one-bedroom apartment in New York City. He joined the Marine Corps and served in the Korean War, earning a Purple Heart for his bravery. His professional career was equally impressive, as he worked his way up the corporate ladder and served as the chief operating officer for Salomon Brothers for more than 16 years. He ended his career as a special assistant to the chairman at Merrill Lynch. A slender, active man, he exercised daily and seemed an unlikely candidate for Alzheimer’s disease.

Lapses in Vincent’s financial acumen were among his first signs of Alzheimer’s. “He could no longer tell what money was worth,” said Mikey. “To him, there was no difference between \$1 and \$100.”

As the disease progressed, Vincent lost his ability to communicate and became isolated inside his own body. Vincent’s wife, Patricia, and his daughter, Karen, served as his primary caregivers. With their help, Vincent was able to continue living on their New Jersey farm.

Mikey, a resident of Atherton, Calif., provided long-distance support by helping Vincent cope emotionally with the effects of Alzheimer’s. When visiting her father, she observed his rapid deterioration. “He became nothing more than a large infant,” she said. “He was not the same person I loved and adored.”

**Taking a bold step.** Motivated by her father’s struggles, Mikey and her husband, Jay, became involved in the Alzheimer’s Association and joined the Zenith Society in 2004. “We wanted to help unlock the code to this disease, so others would not have to endure what we did,” she said.

For the Hoags, their Zenith gift was a way to directly stimulate progress toward a cure. “If funding for research runs out, we’ll have to start turning away scientists,” Mikey said. “And one of those scientists may be the one whose work leads to a solution.”


Jay and Mikey also explored fundraising at the grassroots level. Jay, an avid runner, was busy training for the 2006 San Jose Marathon when inspiration hit: He would dedicate his race to his father-in-law and ask for donations to help fight Alzheimer's disease.

Sadly, just two weeks before the event, Vincent died. Jay again reached out to friends and family to let them know he was running in Vincent's memory. The donations poured in — both from those who knew the Hoags personally and those whose lives had been touched by Alzheimer's. Jay received gifts ranging from \$10 to \$100,000, and raised more than \$365,000 in memory of his father-in-law.

**A challenge — and a response.** Steadfast in their desire to drive the pace of research, the Hoags recommitted themselves to the cause by issuing a Zenith Society Match Challenge in spring of 2007. The challenge asked others to become Zenith donors, at which point the Hoags would match their donations with another Zenith level gift.

By December 2007, Ron and Betty Profili, the Neuwirth Family Foundation and the Lee and Mary Morgan family all met the Zenith Challenge issued by the Hoags. "We were surprised and incredibly thrilled that the challenge was answered so quickly," said Mikey.

The Hoags hope that their involvement with the Zenith Society will inspire others to take action. "Since Congress is not increasing NIH [National Institutes of Health] research funding, the need for private contributions and partnerships is greater than ever before," said Mikey. "It is imperative that individuals help maintain the momentum needed to find a cure."

Despite the complications that the Alzheimer puzzle presents, Mikey is optimistic that a cure is on the horizon. "I wouldn't be involved if I wasn't hopeful that we will have a breakthrough," she said. "Hopeful is the only way that I can be." 

### Take your place in the Zenith Society

Zenith Society members represent the uppermost level of giving and donor-investor engagement in the Alzheimer's Association and have collectively given more than \$50 million to Association programs and initiatives.

Benefits to Zenith Society membership include hearing from and having access to leadership from across the Alzheimer field. Members play an active role in deciding which research projects to fund with their collective resources. At the spring meeting each year, a series of top-ranked, peer-reviewed research projects are presented, and members are given the opportunity to choose which will receive the coveted Zenith grant awards.