



gratitude

Riding a Wave of Hope

By Theresa-Marie Wilson, Photos by Ben Schutzer, RunAmuckPhotography.com

Muhammad Ali once said, "Service to others is the rent you pay for your room here on earth." Those words have become a daily practice for local cancer survivor Bob Voglin.

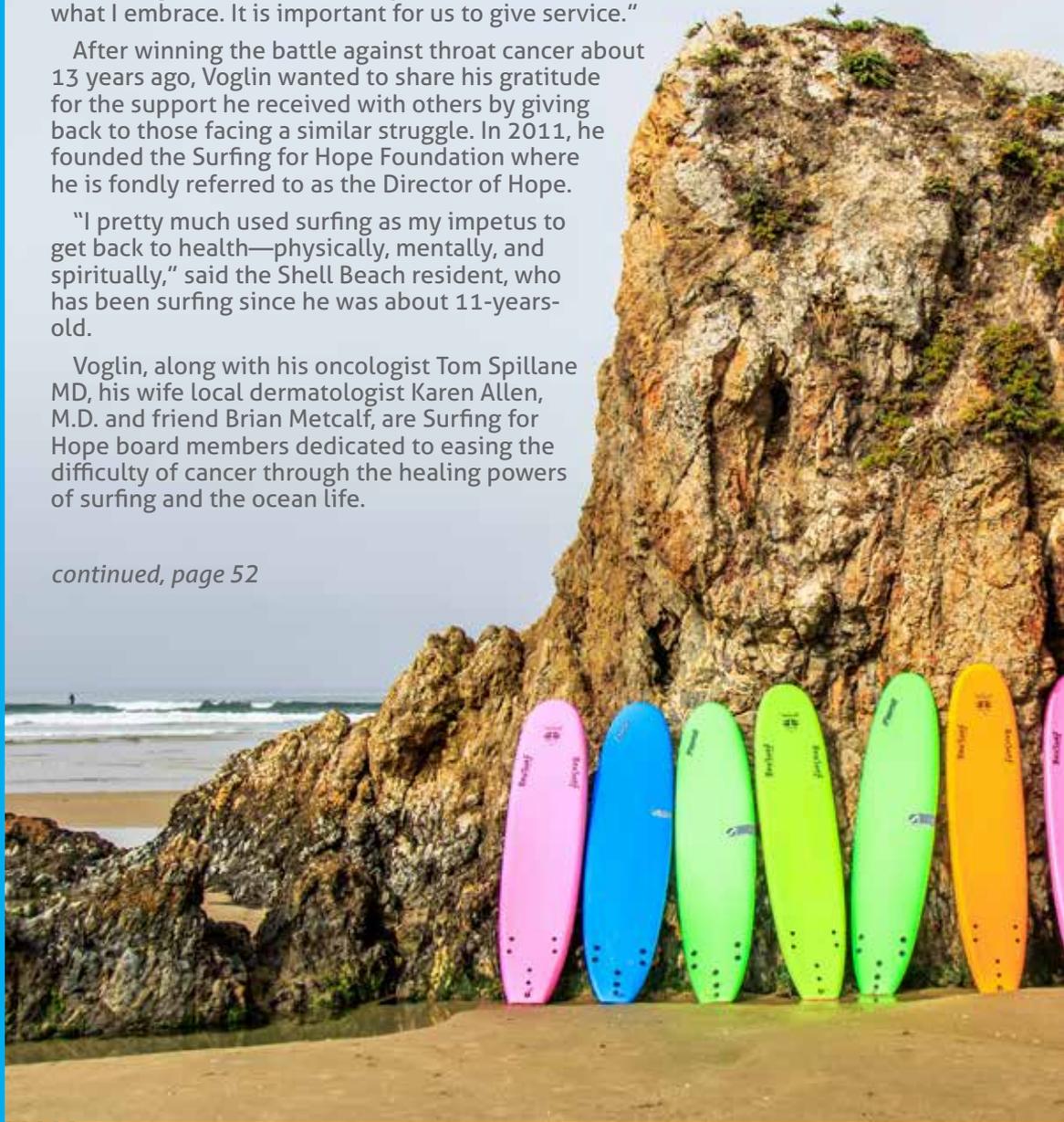
"That's gratitude, and that says it all," he said. "That's what I embrace. It is important for us to give service."

After winning the battle against throat cancer about 13 years ago, Voglin wanted to share his gratitude for the support he received with others by giving back to those facing a similar struggle. In 2011, he founded the Surfing for Hope Foundation where he is fondly referred to as the Director of Hope.

"I pretty much used surfing as my impetus to get back to health—physically, mentally, and spiritually," said the Shell Beach resident, who has been surfing since he was about 11-years-old.

Voglin, along with his oncologist Tom Spillane MD, his wife local dermatologist Karen Allen, M.D. and friend Brian Metcalf, are Surfing for Hope board members dedicated to easing the difficulty of cancer through the healing powers of surfing and the ocean life.

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"Gratitude is the fairest blossom which springs from the soul."

- Henry Ward Beecher



gratitude



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HOW TO GO!

FIND MY RIDE!

Where do I fit into the transportation spectrum?

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"We are a grassroots, non-profit, and in our bylaws it states that no one will ever get paid anything, money-wise," said Voglin. "Our intent is to simply help people that have cancer. It is the medical world and surfing community getting together to help people with cancer through the positive energy of surfing."

The foundation holds an annual Surfing for Hope Longboard Surf Contest and Benefit Auction as well as a Memorial Paddle Out in honor of those who lost the battle with cancer. The event is followed by a dinner. Originally, funds raised went to support the Hearst Cancer Resource Center at French Hospital, which has received more than \$200,000 in monies from the non-profit in the past five years.

The foundation has also donates to additional programs to help support those affected by cancer including Jacks Helping Hand, cancer groups in both Templeton and Arroyo Grande, Mission of Hope, and the Madera Children's Hospital.

"Our tentacles are expanding," Voglin said with a laugh.

This year Surfing for Hope will once again hold the Pure Stoke Youth Program that runs the third Saturday of every month from March through October. The goal is to recognize and provide support to an often overlooked group of cancer victims—adolescent and teenage children whose have family members fighting cancer.

"Mostly their families are going through the crisis and disaster, in many ways, that comes with going through cancer," Voglin said. "A lot of times, the kids get lost in the shuffle. I hope that for a short period of time they get away from a very challenging situation. I hope they get a chance to bond with the other children in a different way, one that is completely removed from the medical situation that they are involved in. The children also see that they are not alone—there are other kids just like them. These kids become an instant tribe."



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SFH board members have found that those children who are living with parents fighting cancer and who are old enough to understand the consequences of their parents plight are generally overlooked by the medical cancer support community. They can have a sense of helplessness as they see the pain and suffering of their parent going through the cancer battle. They are also witness to the emotional strain of the other parent who is trying to support their sick spouse. Although there is often counseling for these children, many do not actively get involved.

“The kids don’t really want to sit around and chat in a room,” Voglin said. “They do want to go out to the beach and have fun.”

Stu Silvani, owner of Shell Beach Surf Shop, provides free rentals of wetsuits and surfboards for the youths involved. The SeaCrest Hotel provides a room for one family as well as a place for the kids to meet-up. Attendees are given free surf lessons and future plans include offering art and yoga classes.

Parents are welcome to stay and spend the day on the beach, or they can leave their child and enjoy some free time as well.

What is it about the ocean, the waves, and the surfing experience that gives people a different perspective on their own struggle or that of a loved one?

“The effects of the ocean, being in the ocean surfing, are remarkable,” said Voglin. “Most people who have surfed, especially most of their lives, really recognize that there is something very special and significant about calming oneself and feeling really good. It is a sport, but it is very different from other sports. When I’ve heard people compare surfing to pretty much any other sport, they say, ‘What sport do people know where the participants will go and look at the playing field, and just ponder things?’ A football player has a field, but the field doesn’t do anything, it just sits there. A surfer goes out there, looks at it, decides it’s not good enough, and thinks it might be better in an hour when the tides change. Surfing is kind of an elusive pursuit because your playing field is always changing. Something about that is the positive energy.”

For more information or to make a donation, check out www.surfingforhope.org.