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Living with cancer takes strength of family, self

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BOYERTOWN — A tall, broad-shouldered UPS deliveryman, Bob Olock is a picture of strength.

He leaves for work each day about 6 a.m. and doesn't get home until about 7 at night.

His spare time is spent with family.

Recently, the 51-year-old Boyertown man's spare time has also been spent going for tests to check the status of his cancer.

Yes, cancer.

Looking at Olock, most people would not suspect that he's living with cancer. But he is.

In June 2007 he was diagnosed with follicular lymphoma, a slow moving cancer that mainly affects older adults.

Despite how devastating a diagnosis cancer is for many people, Olock was given news that not everyone diagnosed with the disease is given. He was told if he was going to be diagnosed with cancer, the cancer he has is the best kind to get.

"Yeah, OK, I got good cancer," Olock said, reenacting the response he gave doctors.

However, Olock said the cancer, in doctor's words, is "highly survivable."

"I'll always have it, but it's survivable," Olock said matter-of-factly.

Several years back Olock thought he may have developed a hernia. He had discomfort in his groin. He went to the doctor.

"The doctor checked me out and said, 'Bob, that's no hernia.'"

The doctor found irregular cells, however, back then it wasn't diagnosed as cancer

It wasn't until a biopsy of irregular cells from a lymph node in Olock's neck in June 2007 revealed that the cells were cancerous that Olock was diagnosed.

He said since his diagnoses, not much has changed.

Because follicular lymphoma is slow-moving, he's not yet had to undergo any treatment for the disease. He's had to undergo tests on his bone marrow, which he said was incredibly painful. He also goes for routine checkups every six or three months and those, he said, can be daunting.

"Right before you go for the tests you get nervy."

What helps Olock get through days when he's thinking about the cancer and about his diagnoses is his family, including his wife, Ruthanne, and his children.

My wife's "my hero," Olock said. "If I get down, I just look at her. My daughters and my grandson, they're my inspiration, but my wife, she's my hero."

Rightfully so. Olock explained that his wife is a 26-year survivor of cervical cancer. She fought the disease as a single-mother before she met Olock. He said he cannot imagine going through what she's gone through.

"She's an amazing lady," he said.

Having known so many friends who have lost their battles with cancer, including his best friend about 10 years ago, and now being touched personally by the disease, Olock said he's looking to a new, wonderfully supportive, uplifting and fun family in the Relay for Life of Pottstown.

"After the diagnosis I saw the Relay for Life thing and I thought I should get involved," Olock said, noting that in the few months he's been involved he's already "made some life-long friends."

He's been working for UPS for more than 20 years, doing the same route for 15 years, and is looking to the people who know him to help his Relay for Life team, in it's first year of existence, go the distance in fundraising and fighting cancer.

"As long as I can put one foot in front of the other, I'm going to do the Relay," he said. "I'm hoping to just get people to stop over (to my Relay tent site). I'd like to invite all the people from the Pottsgrove Class of '75 and '76 to stop over. I'm trying to make a difference."

For more information about the Relay for Life, visit www.pottstownrelayforlife.com, where you can also make a donation. Olock said every team, his included, is grateful for the support.