

*Dedicated to providing educational scholarships to Fairfield County students diagnosed with cancer*

THE 2025 ANNUAL SUSAN FUND SCHOLARSHIP AWARDS CEREMONY



The annual Susan Fund Scholarship Reception was held on Sunday, June 22, 2025, at the Easton Public Library. Nineteen outstanding Susan Fund scholars were honored for their achievements and commended by their families, friends, and the fully volunteer Susan Fund Board of Directors.

Jeff Booth, Chair of The Susan Fund, opened the reception by expressing his genuine admiration for the 2025 recipients. He spoke about the Board's ongoing appreciation for the scholars' strength, character, and perseverance as they pursue their educational goals while facing life's challenges with courage and optimism.

Following Jeff's remarks, David Lloyd offered a heartfelt remembrance of his sister, Susan. Reading from one of her letters, he reflected on her optimism, resilience, and forward-looking spirit. These enduring traits continue to define each new generation of Susan Fund scholars.

This year's Honorary Recipient, Ryan Caulfield, delivered a powerful and inspiring speech, which can be found on page three of this newsletter. His journey from patient to future nurse anesthetist reflects remarkable perseverance, leadership, and commitment to helping others, embodying the enduring spirit of The Susan Fund.

Kelly Frey Pollard concluded the program by highlighting the accomplishments and future aspirations of each of the 19 recipients, celebrating their determination, academic excellence, and community spirit. Each scholar was more than deserving of the award received, and we look forward to hearing about their continued success in the years ahead.

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## FROM the CHAIRMAN / ABOUT SUSAN

It is truly an honor to be associated with The Susan Fund. From its humble beginnings in 1982, we just celebrated our 44th year and distributed a record amount of scholarship awards at our annual reception.

In May, the board met with each of the 19 students who received 2025 scholarships. After each of these meetings the Board was blown away by their stories of courage, optimism, and excitement, as they discussed their lives and educational pursuits. Since our recipients can apply for scholarships every year, we get to see many of them as their academic lives progress.



I would be remiss if I didn't mention another ongoing inspiration for The Susan Fund: Ann Lloyd, our Founder and Chair Emeritus. Because of Ann's vision, dedication and hard work, the Fund has supported the lives of more than 300 Fairfield County residents who have been diagnosed with cancer. Please see page four for a recent interview with Ann that appeared in *Westport Magazine*. In describing what motivates her to continue helping others, Ann said "I've always felt, when you're down, do something for others, as it will help make you feel a little better." Words to live by!

As always, thanks to our 12-person Board who make it possible to keep The Susan Fund moving forward. As non-paid volunteers, they make it possible for the Fund to distribute more than 90% of donations for scholarships. A special thanks to Amy Potts for her time and talents once again, creating our newsletter. Thank you to Jeanne Craig a mother of a current recipient who has volunteered her time to work on our newsletter. Finally, a huge thank you to everyone who financially supports The Susan Fund through their generous donations.

### About Susan



Susan Davis Lloyd was a typical all-American teenager, entering her senior year at Staples High School, when she discovered she had osteogenic sarcoma. Despite having her leg amputated, Susan continued to participate in school activities and hold two jobs. A cheerleader and an outstanding student, she was accepted, early decision to Colgate University. Unfortunately, her chemotherapy treatments were not effective, and she was unable to begin college.

When Susan died, her family and many friends wanted to do something positive to remember her. The Susan Fund, a 501 (c)(3) public charity, was established with the goal of helping other young people who have been treated for cancer attain their educational goals. The Fund has continued to grow, and during the past 44 years has awarded more than \$2.2 million in scholarships. Through the generosity of others, Susan's memory remains very much alive.

### Meet the Board: Susan Baron



Throughout my life, I have worked and volunteered in many roles. I have been an English teacher, a journalist and newspaper editor, a manager of a fitness business, and currently a clinical social worker. I have headed a PTA, established Safe Rides for Westport and served on the Board of Susie's House. I have been a wife, a mother of three sons and a grandmother of five grandsons and one granddaughter. One of my most significant positions has been working on The Susan Fund Board for over 20 years. I have learned so much from each of our candidates. Their grit, determination and strength enable them to tackle their cancer and studies, persevere with their talents - sports, art, music and graduation. Many of our students pursue degrees inspired by the professionals who treated them. Because they are eligible for scholarships during the years they attend all levels of college, the Board Members have the privilege of being part of their journey. We learn about their families, careers and futures.

Endless words can be used to describe Susan Fund recipients: determined, strong, optimistic, amazing and inspiring are just a few. It has been one of my greatest honors to be a member of The Susan Fund Board.

## RYAN CAULFIELD - RECEPTION SPEECH

Good afternoon, everyone. My name is Ryan Caulfield and I am a proud seven-time Susan Fund scholarship recipient. I am approaching the tail-end of a challenging educational journey that was supported by each and every member of the board here today. I graduated with degrees in Nursing and Economics back in 2021, and am now completing the final year of my Doctorate in Nursing Practice in Nurse Anesthesia at the University of Pittsburgh in Pennsylvania.

Back in high school, nursing — let alone anesthesiology — wasn't even on my radar. I was too busy trying to balance competitive rowing with my intense coursework at Staples High School in Westport. Over the course of six months in my junior year, I had recurrent bouts of pneumonia, and breathing got progressively more difficult. My rowing performance declined, and I remember my biggest concern in the world was what my coaches thought of me. I began wheezing, waking up in the middle of the night gasping for air. I was misdiagnosed with asthma, which made me doubt myself more and more as I continued feeling worse and worse despite using the inhaler I was told would fix me. Then my teammates began to mistake my illness for weakness, and I felt more alone than ever. By Thanksgiving, I couldn't climb a single flight of stairs to go from my French class to my economics class without gasping for breath.

I had to advocate for myself that something was wrong, that this wasn't normal. Despite multiple clean lung x-rays, further testing showed that my pulmonary function had more in common with an 80-year-old lifetime chain-smoker than a 16-year-old. A CT Scan determined that I had a significant tumor completely occluding my left lung, encroaching into my trachea, with the added bonus of secreting hormones that made my blood pressure swing like a pendulum. I spent my 17th birthday in the operating room at Yale New Haven to partially remove the tumor in order to open my airway — not the way I ever thought I would be celebrating a birthday, but this procedure gave me a temporary improvement of breathing.

Several more procedures in the OR over the next few months monitored my tumor until the big surgery. In May of my junior year of high school I had my chest cracked open in a 10-hour full reconstruction of my airway and successful tumor removal, recovering for the following 10 days in the cardiothoracic intensive care and step-down units.

It was there that I received the first piece of career advice that sparked my journey in healthcare: an ICU nurse who was carrying my drains, tubes, and lines along with me as I limped down the hall with a walker, encouraging me to be a nurse. I'm not sure if he was especially encouraging, or if it was the blend of heavy pain medication coursing through my veins, but I took this to heart. After a prolonged recovery, when I was applying to nursing school, I happened to see The Susan Fund while searching for scholarships. I could not be more thankful that I clicked the link.

From the very first time that I met with the board, I realized that they cared about my story and academic aspirations. Each year, I began to look forward to our yearly meeting to share what was new in my life and my plans after graduation. Returning to The Susan Fund upon starting graduate school was not unlike attending a family gathering.

Even these yearly receptions are a celebration of our academic and personal achievements despite our experiences, past or current, with cancer. Listening to the stories of the yearly speakers, and honoring and remembering Susan, constantly reinforce my resolve in becoming the best provider I can be. I never knew Susan, but her compassion and bravery is exemplified by this foundation and the opportunities that have been provided to each recipient to pursue their dreams. To Ann Lloyd and each and every member of the Board of Directors, I would like to express a sincere thank you from all of us. Without your support, my 8-year journey to become a nurse anesthetist would not have been possible.



## THE SUSAN FUND IN THE NEWS

### *Westport Magazine Q & A with Ann Lloyd*

Susan Lloyd was a bright, Colgate-bound Staples senior when she was diagnosed with bone cancer. She had a leg amputated and showed all of her classmates what it means to be strong-willed and resilient. Sadly, in 1980, she lost her thirteen-month battle with cancer. Since then her mom, Ann Lloyd, has demonstrated where that resilience came from. Ann recently celebrated her 90th birthday and 44th year of service to cancer patients, through the charity she founded soon after losing her daughter. The Susan Fund has donated \$2 million to Fairfield County students struggling with cancer. Over 90 percent of contributions go directly to scholarships.

Ann, still an active board member, took time to share with us the vital work The Susan Fund does and her own formula for vitality.

#### **Share with us the origins of The Susan Fund.**

Susan passed away shortly after graduating from Staples High School in 1980. We received around \$12,000 in donations in her memory and connected with Candlelighters, a nonprofit that provides support and resources to families of children with cancer. After several years, we went out on our own and started The Susan Fund, a 501(c) (3) whose sole purpose is to provide educational scholarships to Fairfield County students who have been diagnosed with cancer.

#### **In addition to the many students The Susan Fund has helped, how has it helped you cope with the tremendous pain of losing your daughter?**

The truth is, you never lose the pain of losing a child. But I've always felt, when you're down, do something for others, as it will help make you feel a little better. Being part of an organization that has provided 300+ individuals with Susan Fund scholarships has helped not only the recipients, but also helped to keep Susan's memory alive.

#### **Is there a recipient whose story stands out?**

Over the years, I've run into many previous recipients, which is always a joy. Several years ago I was in the emergency room at Norwalk Hospital. The admitting nurse was a former four-time Susan Fund recipient who immediately recognized me. She was delightful and so appreciative of the financial and emotional support we provided.

#### **You recently turned 90! What is your secret for continuing to remain such an impactful member of the community?**

I've been extremely fortunate to still be in good health, with great support from my family, friends and loved ones. Remaining active on The Susan Fund Board has helped me stay active and involved. Every year, the Board personally meets with all our applicants. We get so much out of hearing about their cancer and educational journeys. It's a wonderful feeling to help these courageous individuals.

#### **Do you still live in Westport?**

Yes, we moved to Westport in 1966 and I've lived in the same house for 59 years!

## PREVIOUS RECIPIENT - BRYAN PLATT



Hello everyone, my name is Bryan Platt and I was a beneficiary of The Susan Fund for four years, from 2016-2020. I don't remember how I came across it in the first place to be honest, but I do remember how amazed I was that such a thing existed.

I had been diagnosed with acute lymphoblastic leukemia in April of 2011. Surviving that ordeal led me to pursue an education in Music and Sound Recording at the University of New Haven, and The Susan Fund was one of the scholarships I received that enabled me to do so.

The generosity and kindness of the people involved was astounding, and I really enjoyed going to the gatherings they held to celebrate the collective accomplishments of all of the recipients. I remember being struck by how many fellow creatives there were in the group, and how supportive everyone was of our goals.

Today, I am living in Nashville, Tennessee and working full time as an analyst for a pharmacy company (don't ask me how that came to be), but I am still making music all the time and I occasionally help out a friend of mine in the film industry by working on his audio projects. I truly wouldn't have gotten to where I am without every individual step on the path, and I'm glad to know that The Susan Fund is still helping kids like me achieve their dreams.

## 2025 SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENTS



### **Joshua Arouni**

*Stamford, CT*

**University of Connecticut  
Stamford**

This is Joshua's first Susan Fund scholarship. During his cancer treatment, he found inspiration in the technology that surrounded him in the hospital, which sparked his passion for computer science and artificial intelligence. Joshua plans to pursue a degree in AI and data science, with the goal of developing tools that analyze medical data, create personalized treatments, and improve the recovery of children with cancer. He was president of his school's Interact Club and served as an AWANA leader, a National Honor Society volunteer, and a Youth Data Analyst for Stamford Cradle to Career. His letter of recommendation said he's a "dedicated and impactful leader in our community who will continue to positively impact those around him."



### **Jose Campanario**

*Danbury, CT*

**Western Connecticut State  
University**

Jose is attending WCSU to pursue a degree in finance and also tutors at his local library. Diagnosed with cancer during high school, Jose demonstrated remarkable resilience by persevering through treatment while graduating with his peers. Now in college, he continues to show determination to succeed in the financial sector and maintain a positive outlook for his future. His letter of recommendation reflects both the challenges he has overcome and the maturity he has developed, noting, "Jose has grown personally and I believe he will make this challenge a chapter in his life's story, not the entire narrative." This is Jose's fourth Susan Fund scholarship.



### **Dino Capilupi**

*Brookfield, CT*

**University of Connecticut**

This is Dino's first Susan Fund scholarship. He is attending the University of Connecticut and will be majoring in finance or economics. Dino has developed a reputation for reliability and a strong work ethic. He has held many jobs, from coaching youth hockey to managing a snack bar at a country club and serving in local restaurants. These experiences have helped him develop responsibility and an ability to connect with people in many different settings. Dino is described as hardworking, dependable, and kindhearted. His letter of recommendation praised not only his dedication but also the impression he leaves on others, stating that "Dino always leaves those he meets with a lasting feeling of warmth."



### **Ryan Caulfield**

*Westport, CT*

**The University of Pittsburgh  
School of Nursing**

Ryan is completing his final year as a nurse anesthesia student at the University of Pittsburgh and is graduating with a Doctorate in Nursing Practice (DNP). Ryan plans to work at a Level 1 trauma center, providing anesthesia to critically ill patients, and hopes to use his training to make a direct impact in emergency care. This past summer, he attended the national convention of the American Association of Nurse Anesthetists, gaining valuable exposure to leaders in the field. His letter of recommendation praised both his skill and professionalism, stating he "treats the surgical team, patients, and families with a great deal of dignity and respect and consistently performs above the expected level." This is Ryan's seventh Susan Fund scholarship.

## 2025 SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENTS



### Abigail Cerny

Fairfield, CT

Clemson University

This is Abigail's second Susan Fund scholarship. She is attending Clemson with a goal of earning a degree in biochemistry and hopes to continue to graduate school. She is drawn to medical research and pharmaceuticals with the goal of advancing modern medicine. Abigail has volunteered with the Appalachia Service Project for four years, traveling to West Virginia to help build homes for families in need. She also tutors math, participates in Pi Beta Phi sorority, and is active in the American Medical Women's Association. Her letter of recommendation describes her as "polite, friendly, and exceptionally responsible" and praised her ability to balance academics, volunteer work, and recovery from cancer with "maturity and a strong work ethic."



### Michael Holtz

Fairfield, CT

Fairfield University

Michael graduated from Stonehill College in 2023 with a BA in Economics and a BSBA in Marketing and now works at Fairfield County Bank, where he began as an intern and is employed as a Retail Banking Teller. Michael recently earned his Certified Professional Teller certificate and is pursuing further education in accounting at Fairfield University. He volunteers with Operation Hope by donating pantry goods and meals he prepares himself, and he often brings toys to his clinic for children still in treatment. His letter of recommendation praised his perseverance and intellect, calling him "a very bright, smart, and personable individual... highly self-motivated and capable of achieving anything he sets his mind to." This is Michael's fifth Susan Fund scholarship.



### Anselm Juan

Danbury, CT

Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute

This is Anselm's first Susan Fund scholarship. With a passion for STEM, he attends RPI with a goal of using science to create change. He recently earned his Series 65 license and is developing programs that help families and individuals plan for financial stability. Anselm has volunteered more than 100 hours as an English-as-a-second-language tutor and works with K-5 students in homework help. He has spoken and performed at fundraisers for the Hole in the Wall Gang Camp, combining advocacy with his talents. He continues to face challenges following cancer treatment but focuses on gratitude for the future ahead. His letter of recommendation called him "a deep thinker, a diligent worker, a polymath, and a thoughtful and responsible collaborator with his peers."



### Lauren Kelly

Greenwich, CT

Boston University

This is Lauren's fourth Susan Fund scholarship. She is majoring in music and minoring in speech sciences, with plans to pursue graduate school in speech pathology. Her Capstone project focuses on the connections between speaking and singing, highlighting how the two can strengthen one another. After graduate school, she hopes to work in a clinical setting with adults. Despite medical challenges following her cancer diagnosis and treatment, she continues to pursue her studies and art with determination. Her letter of recommendation said, "Lauren is so much more than cancer... she's a talented musician, vocalist, and artist. But more importantly, she's a wonderful human being."

## 2025 SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENTS



### **Sona Kocinsky**

*Trumbull, CT*

**Harvard Medical School**

Sona graduated from Tufts University and is now attending medical school at Harvard Medical School. She hopes to specialize in pediatric oncology and advance cancer care through both research and compassionate patient care. At Tufts, she served as Vice President of Outreach for Tutors for Hope, pairing students with pediatric cancer patients for free tutoring, and she volunteered more than 60 hours in the inpatient units at Yale New Haven Children's Hospital. She has also been a pre-med mentor and continues her advocacy with MIB Agents. Her letter of recommendation praised her maturity and adaptability, stating, "Sona has the poise, curiosity, patience, work ethic, adaptability, and humility of a seasoned professional." This is Sona's fifth Susan Fund scholarship.



### **Fleuranda Metellus**

*Stamford, CT*

**Southern Connecticut State University**

This is Fleuranda's second Susan Fund scholarship. She recently completed her Associate's degree in Social Work at Norwalk Community College. This Fall she'll continue her studies towards a Bachelor's degree in social work at SCSU. At NCC Fleuranda was an active member of the HASTA club, holding increasing levels of responsibility from secretary to President. She wanted to become more connected to her Haitian culture and spread awareness. Her letter of recommendation states, "She has proven her commitment and dedication to becoming the best she can achieve toward her education. As a student, Fleuranda actively participates in classroom discussions and is helpful to her fellow students. She is interested in learning new things and has a positive attitude about school."



### **Madeline O'Farrell**

*Brookfield, CT*

**Quinnipiac University**

This is Madeline's second Susan Fund award. She is a sophomore in the Occupational Therapy Honors Program at Quinnipiac University. Madeline said, "This degree will allow me to work with pediatric cancer patients in a hospital setting who are experiencing the same or similar challenges that I went through during my cancer journey." This past year Madeline worked as a counselor at Country Kids Play Farm in their after school and summer programs. She enjoyed working with the children from ages 5-7, including getting them off the bus. Maddie's letter of reference states, "Despite her physical challenges (and sometimes pain), Maddie remained an energetic and enthusiastic role model for the children in her care."



### **Sofia Petrafesa**

*Stamford, CT*

**Post University**

This summer, Sofia transferred to Post University to pursue her RN to BSN. The online learning environment will give her the flexibility she requires in order to balance her education and the demands of a nursing career where she will specialize in pediatric oncology. Sofia wants the opportunity to give back to the community that has given her so much. She states, "I am excited to make a meaningful difference in the lives of children and their families as they navigate the challenges of cancer." Sofia's letter of recommendation states, "Sofia possesses the qualities necessary to become an outstanding nurse—compassion, resilience, and an unwavering commitment to patient care." This is Sofia's sixth Susan Fund award.

## 2025 SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENTS



### Declan Ratner

*Fairfield, CT*

**Sacred Heart University**

This is Declan's third Susan Fund scholarship. He is currently a junior in the Physician Assistant -Dual Degree (DPAS) program at SHU, working towards a Biology degree with a minor in Chemistry. This summer Declan worked on research with his professor about the eroded coasts of Stratford beaches. Plants were brought up from Florida to build a barrier at the beaches, and he created a shelter to protect them while they grow. He also worked in a lab and collected data to present in October. Declan's letter of recommendation states, "I firmly believe his academic achievements merit recognition, as he is a dedicated and hardworking student who consistently goes above and beyond, maintaining a near perfect GPA of 3.99."



### Keylin Salazar

*Stamford, CT*

**University of Connecticut**

Keylin is a junior majoring in Human Development and Family Sciences at UCONN Stamford. She hopes to earn her Master's degree in social work and work in a clinic where she can help children and teenagers. This summer Keylin worked at the Children's Community Development Center in Westport for her practicum in early childhood towards course credits. She also enjoyed visiting her grandparents in Guatemala for a few weeks. This is Keylin's third Susan Fund scholarship. Keylin's letter of recommendation states "the field of social work is lucky that she plans to join us in our challenging and important work. Not only will Keylin be an empathetic and caring social worker, but she also hopes to specifically work with pediatric oncology patients."



### Ben Shemesh

*Fairfield, CT*

**Bentley University**

This is Ben's second Susan Fund scholarship. He is a sophomore at Bentley University majoring in Corporate Finance and Accounting. He hopes to have a career in corporate finance, financial consulting or investment management. Ben is an active volunteer with Sigma Chi at Bentley and helped earn \$50,000 for the Huntsman Cancer Foundation and participated in a Call-a-thon that raised \$20,000. Ben's letter of recommendation states, "What truly sets Ben apart is his drive for excellence and his commitment to both personal and academic growth. Ben is a highly motivated and intellectually curious student who has consistently demonstrated exceptional academic performance, analytical abilities, and a strong commitment to his studies."



### Nate Smit

*Stamford, CT*

**Dean College**

This is Nate's fourth Susan Fund scholarship. He is a senior majoring in Psychology with a minor in Human Services. Professionally he would like to work where he can directly impact an individual's life through counseling, social work or community outreach programs and rehabilitation care, getting people resources they need to succeed. This fall he has an internship in Natick, MA with a registered behavior technician working with kids on the autism spectrum. He looks forward to working one-on-one with each child. His letter of recommendation states, "Nate is a highly motivated and conscientious student. He is a polite and personable student who has a wonderful sense of humor. It is my great pleasure to know Nate and work with him."

## 2025 SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENTS



### James Spengler

Fairfield, CT

University of Dayton

James will be a junior this fall at University of Dayton majoring in Marketing. This is James' third Susan Fund scholarship. While enrolled in college, James has found his passion for sales, specifically medical device sales which he plans to focus on upon graduation. His goal is to take the skills he has learned and use them to help hospitals become more equipped to help patients and save more lives. James' letter of recommendation states, "His main distinguishing factor, and the primary reason that I strongly believe that he will be a very successful recipient of your scholarship program is his unbelievable passion for wanting to make a difference, his great work ethic and strong desire to provide service and help others."



### Valbona Terdevaj

Norwalk, CT

DePaul University

This is Valbona's fourth Susan Fund scholarship. Valbona took some gap years to travel the country and work in different jobs. She found Chicago and loves it. She is a psychology major who aspires to obtain a Masters and/or PhD program specializing in Developmental Psychology to become a child development psychologist. She ultimately wants to work with children and help them achieve their developmental milestones. This summer Valbona volunteered in her neighborhood community garden. She enjoyed spending time weeding, watering plants and building fences. Her letter of recommendation states, "I am positive that Valbona will bring her exceptional skills and leadership capabilities to any organization to seek only improvement and surpass her own limits."



### Charlie Watson

Westport, CT

Montclair State University

Charlie is a sophomore at Montclair State University in their BFA program. This fall, Charlie will be managed by a talent management company and auditioning while attending classes. Ultimately, he hopes to be a jazz singer upon graduation. This summer in June Charlie attended a film festival in Hollywood for a premier of Straight Laced, a short film he had a supporting role in. His letter of recommendation states, "Charlie is hard-working, creative and committed to his success. He would do well with any opportunity that helps him expand his creativity and performance art. Charlie is kind with a keen sense of humor." This is Charlie's second Susan Fund award.

## SUSAN FUND UPDATES

### “Willow” at Mill River Village House

For the past three years, Robbi and Bob Hartt have graciously opened the guest house of their historic farmhouse in the Berkshires to Susan Fund recipients and their support network. The couple continues to encourage these visits.

The Hartt's spent four years restoring the house built in 1795, specifically as a retreat for cancer patients and survivors. Whether you are celebrating a remission, in need of a reprieve following a difficult diagnosis, or dealing with the loss of a beloved family member Willow offers a tranquil setting.



The guest house is in New Marlborough, Massachusetts, a charming New England village with a quaint library, post office, and general store, all within walking distance. The house is a two-hour drive from Boston and New York City, and a short drive from places like Great Barrington (recently named one of the best small towns in America), and Stockbridge, where you will find music at Tanglewood, art at the Norman Rockwell Museum, as well as shops, spas and yoga studios. There is plenty in this corner of Massachusetts for nature lovers too, from lakes and hiking trails to ski slopes. Foodies will find a good variety of restaurants, many serving dishes made from locally grown produce.



Tess Michaelson of Boston visited the house in April with her partner, William. It was the first time she had been to the Berkshires.

“It was beautiful,” said Tess, who is a child life specialist at Tufts Medical Center. The couple had fun exploring the town of New Marlborough, as well as surrounding areas. “We took a day trip to Amherst, and that was a lot of fun. William had gone to school there, so I was able to see what he experienced. It snowed during our visit, so we didn’t get a lot of time outside, but we did sit out by the willow trees. The hosts are amazing too. Incredible people with incredible passion. I would encourage anyone to visit. It’s the type of great escape that you may not even realize you need until you get there.”

For more information, please contact Kelly Frey Pollard at [susanfund@gmail.com](mailto:susanfund@gmail.com).

### Special Thanks to Our Foundation Sponsors

The Susan Fund is extremely grateful for the grants we received this year by the Westport Rotary Club, the Westport Sunrise Rotary, the Easton Exchange Club, and the Rotary Club of Trumbull. Their generous support allowed us to increase the amount of our average scholarship awards to this year’s recipients.

Westport Sunrise  
**Rotary**



**Rotary**  
Westport Rotary Club



## MY CANCER JOURNEY

For more than 20 years, The Susan Fund recipients have been my role models. Then, in August 2023, I was diagnosed with stage one pancreatic cancer, a disease that is very difficult to discover at this early stage. Dr. Richard Frank, my medical oncologist and system chief of clinical and transitional cancer research at Nuvance Health and the principal investigator of the pancreatic cancer screening study at Norwalk Hospital, developed the hypothesis. People who are over 50 with new onset or deteriorating diabetes should be screened for pancreatic cancer, as they may be at an increased risk for developing it. Because my physicians were aware of Dr. Frank's work, I was referred to the study.



My results indicated a tumor on my pancreas which had to be removed immediately. After surgery, I was diagnosed with stage one pancreatic cancer. This is very unusual, as most people are diagnosed with late-stage pancreatic cancer because that is when the symptoms start. There's currently no standard screening test for pancreatic cancer. That's why Dr. Frank's study is so important. He and his team of researchers are making progress toward establishing a screening for pancreatic cancer.

After recovering from my surgery, I completed 12 rounds of chemotherapy that lasted about 10 months. As it did its work, the chemo became increasingly challenging. This was where The Susan Fund recipients I had met became my role models. They grit their teeth and tackled whatever challenge came their way. I kept thinking, "They're all so much younger than I am. There is so much life they deserve to live! If they can survive this, I can!" That became my mantra! After my final chemo treatment, I rang the special bell at the Smilow Cancer and joyfully went out into the sunshine. Life had become extremely precious to me.

I am now determined to educate the world about my journey in the hope that knowing about the first signs of pancreatic cancer will encourage everyone to see their physician and endocrinologist immediately. My mission has made me famous! Dr. Richard C. Frank published the story of my diagnosis in The Journal of Clinical Endocrinology & Metabolism under the title Pancreatic Cancer Screen in New-Onset and Deteriorating Diabetes: Preliminary Results from the Pandome Study. In June, I became a You-Tube star! Check out "Pancreatic Cancer Caught Early: The Study That Saved Susan's Life."

None of us can experience cancer and not have it change us. For me, I am trying to seize every drop of life that remains in my cup. Having pancreatic cancer made me realize how strong I am and how many wonderful people there are in my life. I now know from experience how amazing each Susan Fund survivor is. I am honored to be part of their lives.



Susan and Her Family

## Several Original Susan Fund Board Members Get Together

In September, Ann Lloyd, Eve Potts and Marion Morra had lunch for the first time after not seeing each other in years. Ann and Eve were original board members, and Marion was a contributor of cancer information to the Board. Eve and Marion are the co-authors of "Choices: The Most Complete Sourcebook for Cancer Information." Eve's daughter, Amy still supports The Susan Fund by designing the annual newsletter and coordinating fundraising from the Staples High School Class of 1980.



Eve Potts, Ann Lloyd, and Marion Morra

## REMEMBERING FORMER RECIPIENTS

### Scholarship Fund Founded In Honor of Jasmyn Nicolle Gooden

Determined, faithful and compassionate is how family and friends describe Jasmyn Nicolle Gooden, also known affectionately as Jazzy. Her gentle spirit and love for life were an inspiration to all who knew her and admired her ability to always dream and reach for the stars. Jasmyn entered into rest on January 11, 2025, at the age of 31, after a courageous battle with cancer.

Born on September 3, 1993, to Allison and Bernard Gooden of Bridgeport, Connecticut, Jasmyn was always active in spirit, mind and body. She played soccer for the Bridgeport AYSO, enjoyed performing as a student at DeeDee's Dance Center, served as a camp counselor at the Cardinal Sheehan Center, and volunteered with the Village Initiative Project, providing college prep skills for students. She devoted time to her church too, serving as a member of the youth choir and a junior usher at the New Hope Missionary Baptist Church.



Years later, she attended Mount Aery Baptist Church, where she enjoyed Sunday services and would occasionally text from the pew. "They are cutting up today Momma!" which meant the spirit was alive and moving.

Jazzy, writes family, also had a great sense of style—loved ones call her a true fashionista.

After she was diagnosed with GIST cancer at 13, Jasmyn set her sights on becoming a nurse. Even with the interruptions of treatments and surgeries, she graduated with honors from Capella University, earning her Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN). She went on to work at Yale New Haven Health and Stamford Hospital before becoming a travel nurse, caring for patients in Boston, Stamford, St. Louis and San Francisco.

"Jasmyn had curiosity and a passion for knowledge," writes her family. "That, accompanied by her 'just do it' attitude, was something to be admired. She often stood her ground when it came to her medical treatments, which resulted in her being an advocate for others when it came to quality health care."

Education was a priority for Jasmyn, a Susan Fund scholarship recipient, and her family, who recently founded The Jasmyn Nicolle Gooden Scholarship Fund in her memory. The goal of the fund is to honor Jasmyn's legacy, support future nurses and serve as a reminder that life begins with courage.

This scholarship is available to Fairfield County residents who are pursuing RN to BSN degrees, and the fund is currently accepting applications, up until March 31, 2026. For more information, contact [admin@thejazzyfund.org](mailto:admin@thejazzyfund.org).

"We are dedicated, passionate and unwavering, just like Jasmyn," writes her family. "We hope this program serves as a reminder of those core values that made her and others like her worth fighting for."

### Remembering Josh Cappello

Josh Cappello passed away on February 27, 2025, at his home in Trumbull, surrounded by his family and the love and admiration of everyone who had the privilege of knowing him. His beloved standard poodle, Bruce Wayne, was his faithful companion. Josh was an extremely passionate student and dreamed of becoming a college professor of Middle Eastern History. He learned Arabic so he could volunteer in a center to help Arabic children learn English. Josh began his studies at Ithaca College and transferred to Southern CT State University.



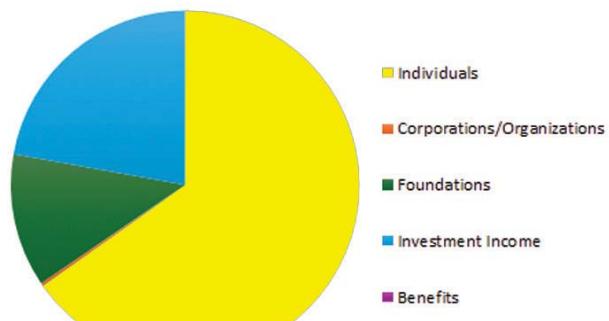
Despite fighting brain cancer for a significant part of his college life, Josh's grades were extraordinary. Steven Judd, Josh's history professor and advisor said, "He was a dedicated and insightful student who was eager to learn. Despite his medical challenges he was always optimistic, kind, focused working diligently to complete his degree. His devotion and determination were inspiring."

Josh was also an advocate for Brain Tumor research. In high school, Making Headway Foundation, a nonprofit dedicated to the care, comfort and cure of children with Brain and Spinal Cord Tumors, invited Josh and his mom Rachel to Washington, DC. Josh spoke in front of Congress at the annual "Head to the Hill" to raise awareness about pediatric brain tumors.

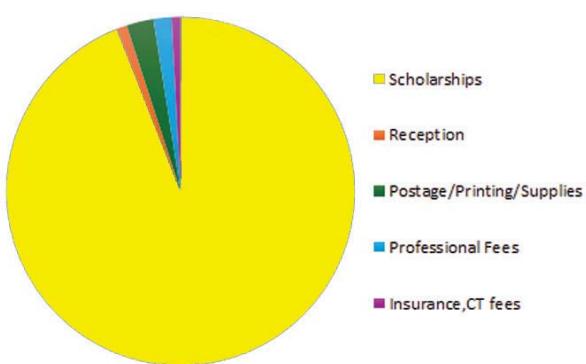
Josh's interests were wide: love of his family and animals, sports, history, government, and politics.

Rachel shared with The Susan Fund that Josh wanted to join The Susan Fund board to give back. We would have welcomed Josh with open arms.

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## Where our money goes:



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- Donate online at  
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- Enroll in an Employer Matching Gift Program, if available

Consult your financial advisor about Donor-Advised Fund distributions, or the tax advantages of Qualified Charitable Distributions (QCD) from your IRA or appreciated securities.

## THE SUSAN FUND IN THE NEWS

### Susan's Class Celebrates 45th Reunion by Supporting The Susan Fund

In mid-August, over 70 of Susan's Staples High School classmates reunited at Compo Beach in Westport for a beautiful and fun day. They raised \$3,410 for The Susan Fund between donations and silent auctions for artwork created by artists from the Class of 1980.



#### HOW TO BECOME A SUSAN FUND RECIPIENT



- ❖ Be a current resident of Fairfield County
- ❖ Have been diagnosed with cancer sometime in one's life
- ❖ Be attending or planning on attending an accredited post high school institution of higher learning
- ❖ Fill out a Scholarship Application at [TheSusanFund.org](http://TheSusanFund.org), available January 1st and due by April 1st

# The Susan Fund

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