



Survivor Story: Tony Cruz
Retired New York City Fire Department, Ex-Chief of the Smithtown Volunteer Fire Department
Diagnosed with Prostate Cancer in 2000

"I had to give up a career I loved, and I was retired before I was ready."



I am retired from the New York City Fire Department, serving in three companies during my career, Engine 80 in Harlem, Ladder 126 in South Jamaica and Rescue 2 in Brooklyn. I am also a 45-year member and Ex-Chief of the Smithtown Volunteer Fire Department on Long Island, where I live.

I strongly believe in taking care of my health and I do not avoid doctors. Between my two Departments I was getting three physicals a year. It was during a physical for the Smithtown FD, that the Doctor, during an exam felt, nodules on my prostate. It was March 2000, I was 49 years old, in a job I loved, my son was 10 years old and life was going pretty well. My wife and I just bought our first camper and had plans to really enjoy the summer.

I felt like everything came to a stop. The biopsy I had later that month revealed that it was cancer. When the doctor told me I had prostate cancer, I didn't know how I was going to tell my wife and son. It was hard to wrap my head around the diagnosis. I was no stranger to cancer; I lost my mother and sister to cancer several years

Our Vision: To be the global leader in firefighter cancer support, awareness, and education.

Our Mission: To assist firefighters and EMS providers and their immediate families diagnosed with cancer by providing badge to badge support, training and guidance.



before and several years later I lost my older brother to cancer. CANCER was serious and, in my family, did not end well.

We scheduled my surgery, I notified the job of my diagnosis and we finally got our will, health care proxy and living will completed. In July 2000 I went into Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center in Manhattan and had a radical prostatectomy. I did not need chemotherapy or radiation; it was life changing but I made it.

I did struggle for a few years after my surgery with understanding why I got cancer. I had to give up a career I loved, and I was retired before I was ready. In 2006, a friend of mine, called me to say he had prostate cancer, I helped him through his diagnosis. My friend and I went looking for organizations that dealt with Firefighters and Cancer and came across the Firefighter Cancer Support Network.

We called the 800 number, spoke to the founder, Mike Dubron, a California firefighter who founded the FCSN after his own battle with cancer, a few days later, Mike came to New York to meet us. My friend and I both got involved. In the past 13 years I have been a volunteer, a mentor, State Director, National State Director, East and now the Vice President, East. The FCSN has become my avocation and a huge part of my life. I have met really good people, friends and a group of people who are here to get you through a difficult diagnosis and move forward with your life.

I have learned that cancer is not always an ending but sometimes a beginning.

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