

November is Lung Cancer Awareness Month. Lung cancer is the country's most lethal cancer in men and women, with over 127,000 people dying of the disease every year. In Meigs County, 32.1% of all cancer deaths are from lung cancer per the Ohio Dept. of Health. In 2023, American Cancer Society (ACS) researchers estimate 238,340 new cases of lung cancer (117,550 in men and 120,790 in women) will be diagnosed.

While there are many potential exposures that can contribute to lung cancer, cigarette smoking is the #1 risk factor. According to the current Meigs County Community Health Assessment, 28% of all adult Meigs residents smoke. The ACS on 11/1/23 updated its lung cancer screening recommendations, expanding the pool of current and former smokers who should be screened for it every year, starting at age 50. The new recommendations lower the age for initial testing. Previously, the age had been 55. The guidelines for screening were last updated in 2013.

Screening has been proven to reduce lung cancer deaths by 20% with 56% of lung cancers found in Stage 1 to be highly curable. By the time people are symptomatic, treatment options can be limited, so screening offers a better chance for new treatments to succeed. If this screening would have been available several years ago, it might have benefited Meigs County resident Shirley Ann Morris as attested by her daughter Cammy Conlin, who stated "I can't stress enough that maybe, at that time and if she was able to have access to age-appropriate, preventative screening, our family would have had a better outcome or, at least, more time with her." Ann was a mother of three and grandmother of two who was active with her family, church, and friends at the time of her late-stage diagnosis of small cell carcinoma lung cancer in 2005. Ann, who was a hard worker who went non-stop, became ill and believed she had the flu or another virus. After seeking care via urgent care, Ann's health was not improving. A chest X-ray eventually was performed followed by a lung biopsy two days later, which confirmed her late-stage lung cancer diagnosis. Ann was given six months to live by her physician and, thankfully, lived 14 months until succumbing to the disease at age 62 in 2006.

Consequently, Ann's life and legacy have been honored by her family, in particularly, when her son Lee Morris began the Ann Morris Cancer Awareness Poker Run to benefit the Meigs County Cancer Initiative (MCCI). Lee passed away from a different type of cancer in Dec. 2021, but the family, especially Cammy and Lee's widow Mindy, has continued to coordinate the fund-raiser providing MCCI with approximately \$40,000 to date. These funds are used to provide Meigs County cancer patients travelling to cancer-related appointments with gas vouchers and food cards (depending on the location of the appointments).

Fortunately, Ann's daughter Cammy underwent lung cancer screening via a low-dose CAT scan, and while lung cancer was not detected, an adrenal mass was. Cammy had successful surgical treatment in 2023 for gynecological cancer and is now cancer free. Lung screening can identify other diseases including but not limited to emphysema.

Access to this type of care is no longer a barrier in Southeastern Ohio. A pilot project in Appalachian Ohio in conjunction with The Ohio State University (OSU), MCCI, Get Healthy Meigs!, and the Meigs County Health Dept. will be providing mobile lung screening for eligible residents on Nov. 9th from 10AM-3PM and 28th from noon-6PM in Pomeroy on the site of the former Veterans Memorial Hospital (115 E. Memorial Drive). To be eligible, you must be aged 50-77 years old; a current or former smoker who has quit within the past 15 years; a 20-pack per year smoking history (smoke one pack/day for 20 years or two packs/day for 10 years). Medicare. Medicaid and commercial insurances are accepted. Appointments are required. Call OSU today at 614-293-6939.

Courtney Midkiff,
BSC, Administrator

