

# GIVING LIVES BACK

Winter 2025



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**West Park**  
FOUNDATION

***Get your life back.***

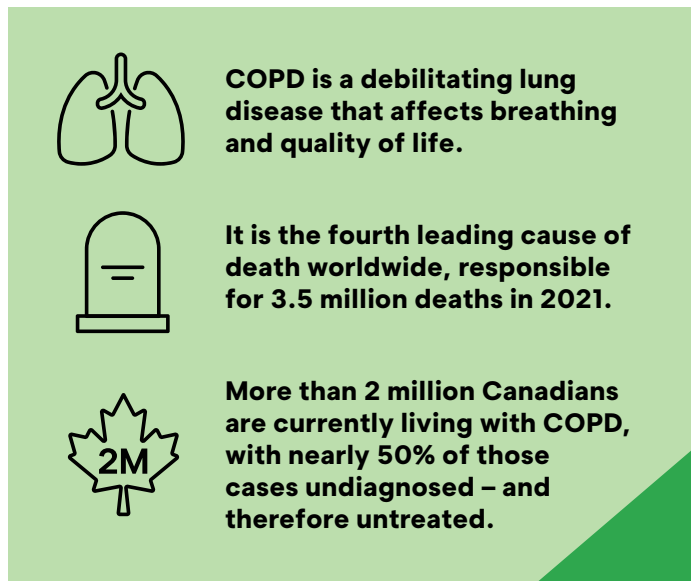
# Imagine if we had gyms for our minds as well as our bodies

By Doug Earle,  
CEO, West Park Foundation

In the 2nd century AD, it was the Roman poet **Juvenal** who wrote the words: *Orandum est ut sit mens sana in corpore sano*. Translation: *You should pray for a healthy mind in a healthy body*.

For Dr. Roger Goldstein, Head Respiriologist at UHN's West Park, the link between mental and physical health, the mind and the body, is fundamental to his treatment approach.

Thirty years ago, Dr. Goldstein identified (in a paper published in **The Lancet**) that physical rehabilitation could improve patient health and delay Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD) symptoms.



**COPD is a debilitating lung disease that affects breathing and quality of life.**

**It is the fourth leading cause of death worldwide, responsible for 3.5 million deaths in 2021.**

**More than 2 million Canadians are currently living with COPD, with nearly 50% of those cases undiagnosed – and therefore untreated.**

But it wasn't until decades later that, in what Dr. Goldstein describes as a watershed "patient-teaches-doctor" moment, his understanding of the extent to which mental health affects one's physical health was crystalized. A long-time patient who had initially done well with rehabilitation showed a dramatic improvement in a six-minute walking test. He had been faithful to his home exercise program and his only treatment change on this occasion was recently completing a course in cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT), which enabled him to better deal with his anxiety. He had identified and enrolled in this course by himself.



Today, it is increasingly recognized that patients with respiratory illnesses, and especially COPD, have a significant associated co-morbidity of mental illness.

Breathing and mood are closely linked and sometimes in people with lung conditions, the experience of worsening shortness of breath is related not just to the lungs but to thoughts and emotions. CBT, a form of psychotherapy, teaches self-help strategies to identify and correctly interpret physical sensations that come from changes in mood. This therapy when added to exercise rehabilitation helps further improve quality of life. Sometimes what feels like a flare up of a respiratory condition requires a more comprehensive assessment that includes mood as well as lungs. Not doing so can extend the period of discomfort, add stress to the patient and expenses to the health system.

For Dr. Goldstein and his team, the natural next step was to integrate mental health support into a multi-disciplinary team approach to rehabilitation.

West Park, in partnership with CAMH, launched its **Fellowship in Mental Health in Ambulatory Geriatrics and Respiratory Disease**, designed to provide comprehensive education to young clinicians interested in specializing in the care of older adults with respiratory conditions who also experience mental health challenges.

This Fellowship is currently held by Dr. Seema Singh, who has been practicing general psychiatry for more than 10 years. It aims to foster the advancement of best practices in delivering mental health care within respiratory rehabilitation programs and to disseminate these practices worldwide.

By integrating mental health care into the management of respiratory conditions, healthcare professionals can improve the overall quality of life for older adults, reduce healthcare utilization, and enhance patient outcomes.

The addition of a mental health expert like Dr. Singh will allow West Park to address this vital component of the disease as part of their rehabilitation programs. Dr. Singh will also help train the whole team to better support mental wellness when treating patients.



# The Healing Power of Nature

*The rooftop garden on West Park's legacy building.*

*Unique courtyard will connect the old and the new, increasing accessibility to West Park's gardens.*

Before the development of antibiotics, tuberculosis was a serious threat, causing thousands of deaths each year in Canada. The only prescription: exercise, healthy food, and plenty of fresh air.

Thanks to a generous donor, the beautiful natural surroundings of Buttonwood Farm were part of the therapy, and patients could often be seen warmly wrapped and lying on lawn chairs in the open air. This site is now UHN's West Park.

Although we now treat tuberculosis differently, in recent years, there has been a renewed interest in the healing effects of nature. Research suggests that exposure to natural areas can lower blood pressure and stress hormone levels, enhance immune system function, reduce aggression, and accelerate the healing process, among many other potential benefits.

Today, a generous \$800,000 donation from RBC Foundation honours West Park's proud history and reflects this renewed understanding of nature as a healer.

The donation is increasing the accessibility of a new courtyard between West Park's new hospital building and our legacy building, now called the UHN Reactivation Care Centre. This courtyard will include a ramp to the second-floor rooftop garden on our legacy building, making this healing space accessible to all patients, visitors and staff at West Park.

Beyond the courtyard, there will be several outdoor therapy spaces, a small water feature, and a partially covered garden-in-the-round at the front of the building. Throughout, tree, shrub and flower plantings will freshen and perfume the air, universally accessible

pathways will make movement easy and safe, and seating alcoves will offer spaces of rest and contemplation.

The donation was made through RBC Foundation's Community Infrastructure Fund, which supports capital projects aimed at reducing environmental impact and improving accessibility in public spaces across Canada.

"Enhancing physical accessibility means a lot to our communities. It ensures indoor and outdoor spaces are inclusive for people of all abilities. RBC Foundation is proud to support the transformation of UHN's West Park campus with the Wellness Courtyard," said Michelle Waite, RBC Regional President, Greater Toronto.

"We are grateful to RBC Foundation for helping bring our gardens to life and making them accessible to our entire community," says Doug Earle, CEO of West Park Foundation. "Over the next couple of years, we will continue to develop unique, outdoor therapeutic spaces to better support our patients as they recover."

Construction is likely to begin in the spring, with planting in the fall and beyond.

"We believe in the profound impact of nature on health and well-being, for our patients, their families, and our staff. The ability to get outside, or even to see nature from inside out, is really important," says Shelley Ditty, Vice President, Campus Development & Support Services.

Ditty adds that West Park is now engaged in research around the benefits of exposure to nature, and once the courtyard is in place, its impact will be evaluated. "We plan to share our findings and communicate lessons learned so that other facilities can learn from what has worked for us."



*Ballantyne (foreground) leads a session on Winter Emergency Preparation.*

# "I'm not alone in this."

## **ACQUIRED BRAIN INJURY SURVIVORS FIND CONNECTION AT UHN'S WEST PARK**

It's a chilly December day outside, but in a room tucked away on the ground floor of West Park's new hospital building, the atmosphere is warm and friendly.

Six men sit around a circle of tables, participating in a discussion on Winter Emergency Preparation lead by Behavioural Support Worker Colin Ballantyne. Despite a cross-section of ages and abilities, they have one thing in common: they're all Acquired Brain Injury (ABI) survivors.

They're at West Park today for the ABI Day Program, a six-month outpatient program that helps ABI survivors enhance their strengths and learn new skills with the goal of living more independently.

Introduced in 2010, the Day Program provides a vital service to ABI survivors, giving them the skills and confidence to reintegrate into society after a moderate or severe ABI.

"Sometimes people come to us if they've been home for a long time, years maybe. Home with family, with the TV. So, they're getting back into an environment that's social," says Ballantyne. "There are demands put on them [in the program]. You have to get up in the morning, you have to get here. You have to contribute."

Clients attend once a week on Monday, Tuesday or Wednesday. There's a group outing on Thursdays and Fridays feature a hybrid session, which patients can join in-person or virtually.

The day begins with check-ins and general conversation, before the group transitions to games and activities. These could be anything from

Scattergories to Jenga, to a game of "would you rather," to "guess the song," memory quizzes and more. They all eat lunch together, followed by an afternoon workshop.

Client and stroke survivor Claudio says that what he really values about the West Park program is that "it's not just medical professionals telling you what you're doing wrong. You joke around. You get advice, but you also get that back and forth [of a conversation]."

Thursdays, clients can join the group outings, which could be a visit to The Ex, a movie, bowling or a mall walk and are a chance for clients to practise activities like purchasing popcorn or being in crowds in a supportive environment.

The Day Program provides a much-needed service to ABI clients, many of whom struggle to return to a normal schedule and re-integrate into the community.

Claudio says, "I was not in a good place when I started the program. You're lost in the beginning, especially when you have a stroke. Having a steady program that I'm going to, helps me develop a routine. That routine allows me to feel a little bit of peace."

He cites "just the talking" as his favourite aspect of the program. "This person went through the same thing as me, they have this advice for me." He says, "You feel 'I'm not alone in this.'"

This is exactly what the program aims to do. Ballantyne says, "what we're focused on and we've been most successful at is community reintegration and building positive relationships. Those are the things we do really well – our gold stars."



*Karen Mackay in front of her favourite painting.*

### *For Karen Mackay, art is many things.*

It's a medium to time travel; therapy to calm the mind; comfort for aches and pains.

"Art magically takes my mind off the sickness," says Karen, 42, who has been an inpatient at UHN's West Park since 2016 when a car accident left her partially quadriplegic.

Over the past eight years at West Park, Karen's interaction with art has been multi-faceted and deeply gratifying. In addition to being an appreciative audience for the works on display throughout the hospital, she discovered her passion for creating art with watercolours and acrylic paint through the Recreation Therapy Department's drop-in classes, and also serves on the West Park Art Council.

Experiences such as Karen's were a key driver in the launching of an art strategy for West Park's new building. It's supported by extensive research demonstrating the ability of the arts to alleviate stress, depression and anxiety, helping patients focus on something beyond their illness.

"It is important to recognize the therapeutic powers of art in a healthcare setting where its purpose goes beyond aesthetics and décor," says Susan MacDonald, Director, Art Strategy at UHN.

Donated art and partnerships with community arts organizations are helping to ensure that West Park's walls aren't empty.

Toronto artist Dennis Lin donated and recently installed his stunning two-storey mobile installation "Milky Way," which incorporates natural materials, some found on campus, to represent how West Park helps people get their lives back.

Another recent installation was made possible by RX Art, a non-profit organization focused on helping people heal through visual art. A beautiful, 100-foot mural by

# Art's healing touch on display at West Park

Canadian contemporary artist Elizabeth McIntosh is now located on the wall next to the south entrance.

Other generous contributions have come from contemporary abstract painter Mike Hammer; donor and West Park volunteer Viola Lobodowsky, who donated pieces from her private collection; and artist Bill Schwarz, who refers to his style as architecture whimsy.

Physicians and staff have also given their artistic creations. Dr. Chris Boulias, a psychiatrist and clinical researcher, donated many of his paintings to reflect particular programs at West Park, while retired staff member Bill Burke contributed more than 25 pieces that humorously capture stories of the hospital.

Karen's favorite work of art at West Park is an oil-on-canvas painting of sunflowers, donated by her friend. Located in the corridor outside her inpatient unit on Level Six, she often immerses herself in it.

"The bright, yellow flowers pop out from the darker backdrop. For me, they symbolize hope."



*Patient Nic Leocadio looks at the mobile, "Milky Way".*

# Helping People Breathe Better ... the COVID pivot and beyond

*Unable to offer in-person pulmonary rehab during the pandemic, UHN's West Park team developed an innovative virtual program that is changing everything.*

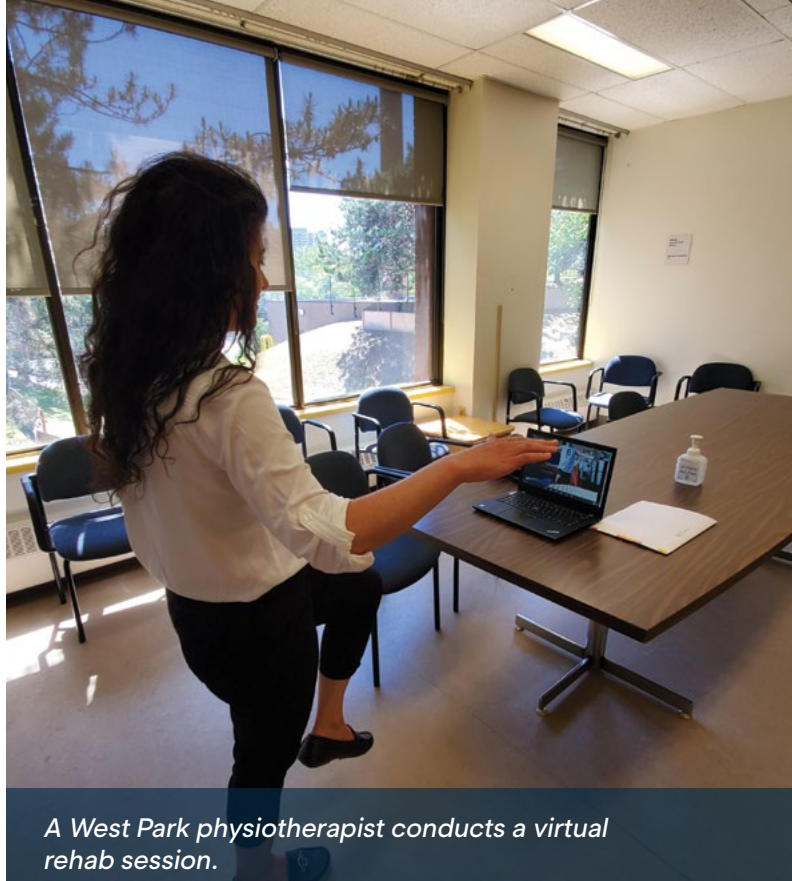
When COVID hit, the team at West Park's renowned pulmonary rehabilitation program was faced with a dilemma. The program was important to their patients but not deemed essential care during pandemic restrictions. In any case, there was no question of patients with long-term breathing challenges coming to the hospital.

So, the team did something truly remarkable—they developed and transitioned to a fully online program. The innovation was such a success that a hybrid version is now part of West Park's offerings and the subject of ongoing research that will inform best practice across the country and beyond.

Physiotherapist Cindy Ellerton admits the transition wasn't easy. "We weren't used to assessing patients remotely, teaching online, and communicating with patients by email," she says. "We also had to think about how we could get people exercising at home without the equipment we use in the Centre, and what technology platform to use." Privacy and emergency planning were issues too. Thanks to West Park's international reputation, Ellerton was able to consult with centres across Canada and in Australia and the U.K. that were dealing with similar questions.

The benefits were immediately clear. The online program expanded the geographic reach of the West Park pulmonary rehabilitation program and made it easier for working patients to fit rehab into their schedules. After COVID, West Park has continued to offer online programs, although it now includes pre- and post-program visits to the hospital for assessment.

Lee Verweel, Manager of Research and Innovation at West Park, led the first study to look at the success of the virtual program. He interviewed patients and healthcare providers for the study, which



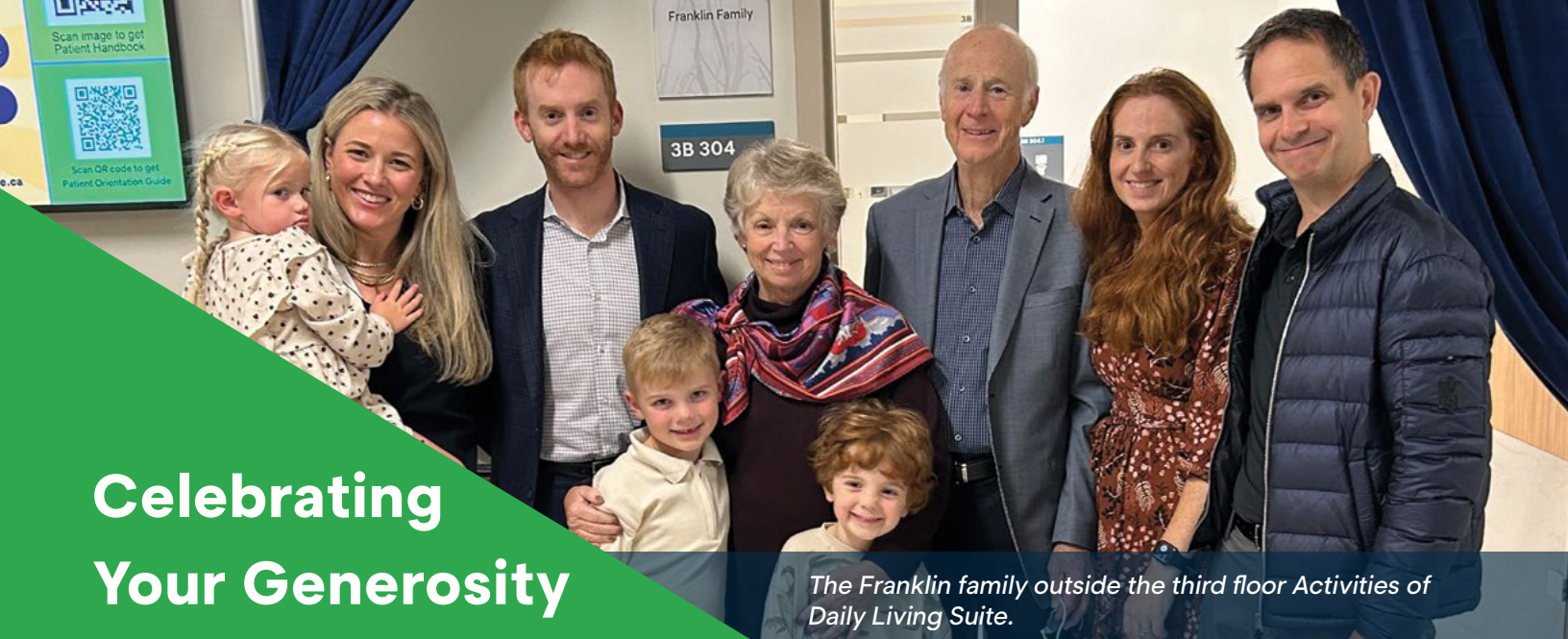
*A West Park physiotherapist conducts a virtual rehab session.*

recently appeared in **Respiratory Medicine**. He says a number of factors—more user-friendly software, more acceptance of videoconference technology, and the necessity of the pandemic—came together to create a "magic solution" with many ongoing advantages. "It's not necessarily a one-size-fits-all approach," he says, but is an important addition to in-person rehabilitation programs.

Another research project focused on the experiences of other centres that pivoted to virtual programs. A survey revealed that while several different technologies were chosen, most centres used synchronous videoconferencing and eventually moved to hybrid models.

When it became clear that there was no comprehensive database of pulmonary rehab programs in Canada for people to know where to go for care, the West Park team partnered with Lung Health Foundation to fill the gap. Later in 2025, the information will be available to patients and providers on Lung Health's website, searchable by postal code to help people find a program close to home.

"It was an awakening," says Ellerton about the pivot to online rehab. "We had never even considered virtual before the pandemic." Verweel adds, "This was a huge shift for everyone. The research is a way to understand the changes and what they mean for best practice. By combining clinical excellence with the academic rigor that West Park is known for, we can help improve the health system overall."



# Celebrating Your Generosity

*The Franklin family outside the third floor Activities of Daily Living Suite.*

This past fall, we were delighted to begin recognizing the many donors whose generous gifts have helped to make our new hospital a leading-edge facility.

“Opening our new building last April was a historic milestone for UHN’s West Park, one that was only made possible through the collective generosity of our donor community,” says Doug Earle, CEO of West Park Foundation.

Foundation and Centre staff and volunteers celebrated with five donors and their guests as we unveiled the areas in the hospital that recognize their generosity and commitment to our patients:

**Don Buchanan** paid tribute to his late, long-time partner, Mary-Jean Deeth, by naming a resting alcove in her honour. This inviting space on the third floor is a cozy place for patients and visitors to gather, or rest as they walk through the hospital.

**John Franklin** is a former Foundation board member and was part of West Park’s Campus Development Committee when our new building was being planned, helping make our hospital the world-class facility that it is today. John and his wife Susan’s generous contribution to our capital campaign is being recognized through the Franklin Family Activities of Daily Living Kitchen.

**The Kiwanis Club of Kingsway Humber** showed their community spirit and commitment to West Park through two generous donations, which are being recognized with the Kiwanis Club of Kingsway Humber Piano Lounge and the Kiwanis Club of Kingsway Humber Children’s Play Area.

**The Wyman-Steinsky Concourse** (on the cover) and the **Michael, Anna and John Wyman Reflection Area**

recognize the long volunteer service of former Foundation board chair Georgina Steinsky, and pay tribute to Georgina’s son and two grandchildren who died tragically in January 2021. Many generous members of the West Park community helped to make these special recognitions possible.

**My MS Family’s** generous contribution to our capital campaign, spasticity research related to multiple sclerosis and equipment costs for MS patients is being recognized through the naming of the sixth floor Activity Room.

“We are grateful for every single gift, and to have had the opportunity to thank these generous donors in person,” says Doug Earle. “There are many more of these special occasions to come, and we are looking forward to all of them.”



*Katy and David Collier (holding a picture of the late Syd Collier, a Kiwanian and long-time West Park volunteer) celebrate the opening of the Kiwanis Club of Kingsway Humber Piano Lounge.*



## Culinary Showdown a Sizzling Success

*Team Chef Antonio Park celebrates their victory as the Culinary Showdown Champions.*



## Tournament of Stars – Back for 2025!

*Jamarion Moon (left) attempts to block Ricky Davis (right) from shooting.*

The 2nd Annual Culinary Showdown on Saturday, November 2 raised more than \$528,000 in support of UHN's West Park Healthcare Centre!

Some of Canada's hottest chefs – Claudio Aprile, Nicole Gomes, Alvin Leung, Mark McEwan and Antonio Park – were joined on stage by their teams of top fundraising foodies for a live culinary battle, cheered on by guests of the gala dinner.

Thank you to all participants, guests, donors and sponsors for making this year's event a success. See you next year!

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**KitchenAid**

Toronto's hottest amateur basketball event is back! On March 21-22, teams of UHN's West Park supporters will join NBA and WNBA alums including Jamaal Magloire, Jerome Williams, Matt Bonner and Carlos Boozer to compete for the hotly contested Tournament of Stars Championship title.

The event gets underway on Friday, March 21 with the Celebrity Draft Party, where teams draft their celebrity teammate. The more money a team raises, the higher their chance of drafting their favourite NBA or WNBA star.

Tip-off is the next day at the University of Toronto's Goldring Centre for High Performance Sport, where the excitement will build from the moment the games get underway. The tournament is a fun, family-friendly event, with a 3-Point Shootout Competition open to all attendees.

Visit [WestParkTournamentofStars.ca](http://WestParkTournamentofStars.ca) to learn more about how you can participate in the tournament and support West Park! Register a team, purchase game day tickets, or donate to a team or an individual player.



**West Park**  
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*Get your life back.*



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**Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Statement:** At West Park Healthcare Centre Foundation, we are committed to fostering an inclusive, diverse and accessible environment, an important part of living our brand. We are dedicated to building a staff and board that reflects the diversity of our community.