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## Breaking News

### Marshal faced deadly enemy: ovarian cancer

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Deputy U.S. Marshal Lisa Alfonso is dedicated to helping women fighting cancer alone

By ELAINE SILVESTRINI | The Tampa Tribune  
Published: April 29, 2012

**TAMPA** -- After 13 years of chasing fugitives and guarding federal prisoners, a deputy U.S. Marshal faced a more daunting foe: stage 3 ovarian cancer.

After five hours of surgery and 10 months of chemotherapy, Lisa Alfonso is back at work, still hoping to catch a notorious drug fugitive while trying to help other women who are fighting cancer alone.

"I'm lucky to be here," Alfonso said. "I've been blessed. I'm going to take the time I have here to try and, yes, help as many women in this community as I can."

Alfonso's dark brown locks are gone, replaced by salt-and-pepper hair. But her determination is the same steel it's always been.

Her co-workers at the U.S. Marshals Service and the Federal Court Officers will host their 12th annual Charity Golf Tournament in Alfonso's name on June 2. Proceeds go to Celma Mastry Ovarian Cancer Foundation, which helps women with ovarian cancer.

Alfonso wants women to be aware of the symptoms of ovarian cancer — a disease that killed nearly 15,000 women in the United



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- [Event website](#)
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#### CHARITY GOLF EVENT

The U. S. Marshals Service and Federal Court Officers will host their 12<sup>th</sup> Annual Charity Golf Tournament in Lisa Alfonso's name 12:30 p.m. June 2 at Plantation Palms Golf Club in Land O'Lakes. All proceeds will go to the Celma Mastry Ovarian Cancer Foundation.

They are seeking corporate sponsors, hole sponsors, boosters, door prizes and golfers. Prizes will be awarded.

Registration begins at 10 a.m.

A \$70 entry fee must be received by Tuesday. The fee covers course fee, golf cart, barbecue dinner and prizes.

For information, contact Charles Martini and Dexter Sylvester, c/o United States Marshals Service, 801

States in 2007, the most recent year statistics were available.

Alfonso says she thinks if she knew more, she would have been diagnosed before she reached stage 3. The pains started in her lower abdomen in late January 2011. She went to her doctor for testing in late March, then for a second test in early May. She said she was told the doctor wanted to watch her for 90 more days. But Alfonso said she didn't want to wait.

Asked what her pain was on a scale of 1 to 10, Alfonso said 9½. On June 10, she had an MRI. That test showed one of her ovaries had ruptured and the other had a solid mass.

She said that if she had waited 90 days, she would have died.

Alfonso's surgeon, Megan Indermaur, said Alfonso's experience is common among ovarian cancer patients. "We haven't found the right techniques to diagnose it early." If Alfonso waited 90 days, "she would have a lot worse cancer, that's for sure."

Indermaur said women need to be aware of their bodies and advocate for themselves with their doctors. They also should know that pap smears are important for detecting cervical cancer, but do not detect ovarian cancer.

"For ovarian cancer," Indermaur said, "there's a lot of vague symptoms," such as pain and persistent bloating, that can be attributed to other things.

By the time many women report symptoms to doctors, "they're already stage 3 or 4," the surgeon said, but they will look back and realize they've had problems for six months. Getting through to the doctor is important, Indermaur said. "Sometimes it just takes a patient to say, 'This is not normal for me, what are you going to do about it?'"

Two weeks after the MRI, Alfonso went in for a hysterectomy. The robotic surgery was to involve five small incisions. After making the first incision, Alfonso said, the doctor dropped a scope into her body to look around.

"She said it appeared as though someone had taken a straw and filled it with beach sand and had blown cancer throughout my lower abdominal area," Alfonso said.

Indermaur spent 5½ hours removing all the cancer.

The morning after surgery, Alfonso said she told Indermaur, "Hit me with everything you've got."

The surgeon said: "Don't worry. I promise I'll knock you down."

"I'll never forget those words as long as I live," Alfonso said.

Then chemotherapy started. She had six cycles of three treatments each. She lost all her hair, eyelashes and eyebrows. She didn't recognize the person staring at her in the mirror. She became nauseated and tired, and spent days in bed.

The first chemo cycle was almost her last. When she went for her second cycle, she told her nurse she was done. She couldn't take it anymore.

The nurse reassured Alfonso she would get through it. But it was an older patient, a woman named Jean, who knocked some sense into her.

"Lisa, look at me," Jean said. "I'm 78 years old. I'm going home. I'm taking off my wig; I'm taking off my false teeth and I'm removing my Depends. The next time you think about giving up, I want you to think about me."

"That was a very profound moment for me," Alfonso said. "She just kind of kicked me in the butt. ... It's just

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*The Tampa Tribune*

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**OVARIAN CANCER: THE SIGNS**

The following are symptoms of ovarian cancer, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:

Abnormal bleeding or discharge

Pelvic pain or pressure

Abdominal or back pain

Bloating when the area below your stomach swells or feels full

Changes in bathroom habits

Feeling full quickly while eating

"These symptoms may be caused by something other than cancer, but the only way to know is to see a doctor," the CDC website states. "The earlier ovarian cancer is found and treated, the more likely treatment will be effective."

amazing how one person could make a difference in a person's life."

She said she couldn't have gotten through treatments without the support of friends, family and co-workers. "I had people sitting with me day after day," she said.

People helped her get IV fluids at home so she didn't have to go to the hospital. "I cry every time I think about it," she said. "It was overwhelming. It really was."

She says she can't imagine getting through all that without the support. And now, part of her mission is to help single women in the Tampa area — like some of the others she met during chemo — who have ovarian cancer and are alone.

Her family threw a fundraising party in December, and the money they raised was given to the Celma Mastry Foundation, earmarked to help single women.

"She is a fighter," said Claudette Mastry Carlan, president of the foundation started by her mother. "One of the missions is to spread awareness, and I think Lisa can do that because she has the disease and she wants to talk about it. She puts a face with the disease."

Because of that, Alfonso was asked to join the foundation board. She participated in the foundation's 5K event in September, only three months after her surgery and while her treatments were in progress. "That was amazing," Mastry said. "Truly amazing."

Alfonso said she thought the walk would be too difficult, physically. But about 100 family members and friends showed up to support her, all wearing T-shirts saying, "Team Alfonso."

The outpouring enabled her to mentally overcome physical pain.

Alfonso's assignment with the U.S. Marshals Service is as a protective intelligence officer. "We gather intelligence on anything going on (involving) threats, things of that nature," she said.

It mainly involves federal court officers, including judges, prosecutors and public defenders.

Alfonso is determined to capture a fugitive she trailed for years: Elrick Bernard Wynn, once one of St. Petersburg's most-feared drug kingpins.

Since his violent crack empire was dismantled in the late 1990s, he has stymied U.S. marshals. His case was on "America's Most Wanted" last year.

Authorities estimate Wynn's organization imported 40 to 60 kilos of cocaine into the city every month between 1994 and 1996. It netted about \$8 million a year and was linked to two homicides.

"Every airport I walk into, I'm looking for him," Alfonso said. "Every grocery store, I'm looking for him. ... We'll find him. I'm absolutely confident that we'll locate him. It's just a matter of time."

esilvestrini@tampatrib.com (813) 259-7837

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**Barbara W Hugg** · Safety Harbor, Florida

This is a wonderful story. We have a friend with a very similar story who just finished her chemotherapy. Her amazing attitude and positive thinking amazed me every day.

Bless this women and others who must go through such an ordeal.

Reply · 6 · Like · Follow Post · April 29 at 6:39am



**Melissa Mitchell** · Top Commenter

We need far more awareness for cancers that have dramatically lower survival rates like ovarian, melanoma, pancreatic, liver, brain, etc. Nationally, the only thing anyone really hears about or raises money for on a grande scale is breast cancer. It's very frustrating. Kudos to Lisa for her brave fight and push for awareness.

Reply · 3 · Like · Follow Post · April 29 at 3:31pm



**Thomas Alfonso** · Works at New Balance

Great Article Lisa, We Love You & Are So Proud Of You. Keep Up The Good Fight !!!

Reply · 3 · Like · Follow Post · April 29 at 1:56pm



**Carole R Cowan**

Finally read your article. Wow....what a fighter. I am so proud of you. I will never forget the day I met you at the Mastry run with your team of 100! Yes, we do need to put a face on this awful disease....no one better than you to do it. Bravo for being so brave and courageous.

Reply · 2 · Like · Follow Post · May 5 at 10:07am



**Carole Arnold Schicke Scoble** · County College of Morris

Keep up the good fight! Go Girl.....God Bless.....Carole Arnold Schicke Scoble.

Reply · 2 · Like · Follow Post · April 29 at 5:11am

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