Giving back and looking forward

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Donatos couple leads this year’s Go Red for Women

Donatos means to give a good thing in Latin. This year, husband and wife, Jane Grote Abell, chairwoman and founding family member, and Tom Krouse, president and CEO of Donatos Pizza, are giving a good thing by being the co-chairs of the 2016 Go Red For Women in Columbus.

The couple knows firsthand the effects of heart disease and stroke, and their company is committed to offering heart-healthy menu options to the communities it serves.

The two were together when they received a call last summer from Abell’s mother, who suffered three minor strokes. Had it not been for a Go Red event she had attended, Abell said she wouldn’t have recognized the signs and gotten her mother the attention she needed. And thankfully, her mother is doing well today.

Krouse’s father died of a massive heart attack at age 58. Like so many others, Krouse said he had always thought of heart disease as something that affected mostly men. However, heart disease and stroke, according to the American Heart Association, are the No. 1 killers of women.

How has having a family history of heart disease affected how you live and raise your children when it comes to heart-healthy lifestyles?

Tom: It’s the whole idea of healthy eating and owning it — what it means and then paying attention to it. As for my children, it’s about being conscious about the food I’m eating and what I’m feeding them. Tom and I have a personal trainer, and we are members of Snap Fitness Gyms, which is owned by my son.

Jane: For me, the moment of recognizing I need to take better care of myself happened in 2003 after I stepped on the scale. Recognizing that my kids were young and that I have a responsibility to take care of them, be around for them and to stay alive. It really was as simple as that.

What do you do to reduce your risk?

Jane: It’s about being consistent in what you eat and how much you exercise, which helps with mental clarity as well. I work out with my teenage daughters, who motivate me to work out more.

Tom: One thing is to take control of your calendar, because you can allow anything to get in the way. You have to make exercise a priority. It’s on our calendar to work out together certain times of the week. And we get our kids involved. It’s about accountability.

Is there an activity you have stopped/started in which you been able to see the rewards of being more heart-healthy?

Jane: I quit drinking soda two years ago. I used to have up to four or five a day. Eating balanced meals and snacks help eliminate the cravings. Clean eating just makes you feel better about yourself.

Being part of Go Red has made it even more top-of-mind that the issue is out there and people need to learn more about their risks.

Jane: When I eat right and exercise I feel more relaxed as a leader and as a parent, and my energy level is higher. The idea of balance is important but it has to be reasonable — it’s OK to have a cheat day.

Has either of you been diagnosed with heart disease or other conditions that are precursors to developing a heart condition?

Tom: I had higher-than-ideal cholesterol numbers in the early 2000s. My doctor immediately prescribed a medication. I said wait a minute; aren’t you supposed to tell me to eat better and exercise? He said I could try it, so I did and there was a huge improvement in my numbers. It’s not work for everyone, but it worked for me.

Donatos has committed to offering heart-healthier options to communities it serves. Can you give a couple of examples of how you are achieving this?

Jane: We want to make sure we offer a balanced menu for balanced lifestyles, and we also have gluten-free options in our restaurants.

Plus we’ve always stressed the importance of using the freshest ingredients. It’s always ongoing — it just what we’ve done since my dad started the company 52 years ago. It’s part of our foundation — to serve people with a great quality product and be responsible always.

Tom: There’s an ongoing effort to make sure we have high-quality ingredients that are nutritional and taste good, and we are committed to reducing the sodium content in our products. Our chefs have been working with a team from the American Heart Association over the past year to learn more about how we can improve upon our practices. Additionally, six of our products meet five of the six AHA nutritional standards, including a Caprese side salad, Italian side salad, chicken harvest salad, a vegan pizza (at select locations), a skinny pizza and stuffed jalapeños.

Jane: As co-chairs we want people to take time to better educate themselves on heart disease and what it means to their families. It’s about the simple changes you can make everyday.