

LIVE

GREG LEE,
President of
the Livestrong
Foundation,
talks with
Brunswick's
**EDWARD
STEPHENS**
about how the
organization
endured after
the collapse
of its founder's
reputation

GREG LEE JOINED LIVESTRONG AS ITS Chief Financial Officer in 2006, when its founder, professional cyclist and American icon Lance Armstrong, was still the public face of the organization. It was one of the most recognizable and well-supported foundations in the US. By 2011, the foundation was generating \$47 million in revenue, had 90 employees, and was providing cancer information and services to more than 600,000 people annually.

Armstrong's confession in 2012 that he had taken performance-enhancing drugs throughout his cycling career damaged the charity he had helped found. The link between the founder and his foundation had long been close: the iconic yellow of the Livestrong brand – and bracelets – were inspired by the yellow jersey of the Tour de France, given to the competition's winner. Armstrong was stripped of his seven Tour de France victories and resigned from the Livestrong board. Funding dropped, and the foundation had to cut costs and its offerings.

Early in 2016, Lee became Livestrong's President. His challenge is to revamp the charity without its celebrity endorser, and shift the focus back onto the work the organization does.

The foundation appears to be on the right path. Over the first two quarters of 2016, Livestrong received its first seven-figure donation since 2010 and reported a 36 percent increase in the number of people served – ranging from helping cancer victims navigate the health insurance maze to providing counseling and financial aid.

We sat down with Lee, a skin cancer survivor, to talk about the organization today, how it handled the fallout from Armstrong's revelations and what he sees as its path forward.

How difficult was it for the organization when its founder was the subject of such scrutiny?

It was an uphill battle for us after Lance's public revelations. There were a lot of changes and challenges we had to navigate through.

We knew we had to work harder to remind people, remind the public, what we do, how we do it, and make sure people understood that Livestrong was still here to serve cancer patients and their families.

Our mission really drove everything, and our constituents are at the center of that mission. Driving that home was, and still is, job one. And that's no different today than when I started.

ON

Did you experience any frustration, especially during 2012 and 2013, when the discussion was at its most intense?

I wouldn't be honest if I told you I wasn't frustrated. Everyone wants to focus on a spokesperson or a founder, yet we all know, no organization is about one person.

So I was frustrated that the talk and discussion was not about the good work that we do, that a lot of our time and energy were being spent on answering questions about the actions of the founder and the cycling community, which has nothing to do with the cancer community.

I was concerned about what kind of impact that would have on our organization, which is trying to do a lot of good things for a lot of people. Because what we want to focus on is providing care for cancer patients and survivors. I want people with a cancer diagnosis to be able to pick up the phone and ask us, "How can I get access to clinical trials?" "Is there somebody I can talk to about what I'm going through?" "What will my insurance cover?"



How did you handle that frustration?

We really just kept beating the drum to say we are not about just one person, we're about a mission that's bigger than us; we're about the 34 million people around the globe who are battling through a cancer diagnosis, the roughly 15 million in the US doing the same. We just kept saying that, time and time again. We didn't need to stand up and toot our

own horn, but we needed to share the story of our constituents, the battles they face, how we can help.

I'm a runner and I'd compare some of those moments to being at the 19th or 20th mile in a marathon. You're tired, you're exhausted, you're having everything in the world come at you, and you just have to dig deep, find something – a bigger reason to keep you going.

Under a shower of yellow rose petals, riders finish the 2016 Livestrong Challenge, an event that raised more than \$1.3 million in donations. All cancer survivors receive yellow roses as they cross the finish line

LIVESTRONG'S LONG RIDE

1997

The foundation is established as the Lance Armstrong Foundation



LAF raises \$1 million – a major milestone for a young organization. Armstrong wins his first Tour de France

1999



2004

Nike starts making yellow Livestrong bracelets, which become a worldwide symbol of cancer awareness. They help raise more than \$100 million in donations

Armstrong is stripped of seven Tour de France titles. The foundation officially changes its name to Livestrong

OCT. 2012



NOV. 2012

Armstrong **RESIGNS** from the foundation

INTERVIEW | GREG LEE

What proved most effective in getting the message of Livestrong across?

Probably sharing stories about the people we've helped. We had a Home Depot executive who was diagnosed with a particular illness that affects his liver function. He has two young kids. We helped him find the best liver specialist in the country and helped him navigate the medical expenses. And we helped the family explain to their two young daughters what Mom and Dad were going through. It's stories like that we try to tell, that really help the public understand what we do every day.

We also felt that being utterly transparent about how we operate was important.

To help restore a sense of trust?

If you're a private company and you take shareholder money, you have a lot of discretion of how to use it. Investors are mostly hoping you will return a profit for them.

But when we're taking donations from you and your neighbor, we have an obligation to do better, to hold ourselves to a higher standard. We have lives at stake. We are using the public's money to do good, to help cancer survivors and patients.

So what that means for us is that, literally, if you have a question, we'll answer it. We'll tell you where the money goes, where we get the money. We'll explain to you the stories of who we help.

Charity Navigator gave us four stars [the highest possible] in its recent ratings, and we got 100 percent in the transparency category. I think the public really respects that.

How much time do you spend reviewing how you handled the reputational crisis?

My focus right now is on the upside. We're up in terms of the demand for our services. We're working with the YMCA at more than 500

locations to help cancer survivors as they train to rebuild their strength and stamina. So I don't have enough time to focus on the downside. I'm more concerned about the things ahead of me.

Someone once told me that if you're driving down the highway at 100 miles an hour, you're probably going to get where you're going if you look through the big windshield. If you try to look in your rearview mirror, it's going to be harder than hell, and you're probably going to have a wreck. I may glance at that rearview mirror. But I'm not going to focus on it.

Has Livestrong's experience telling the stories of cancer survivors helped the organization tell its own story?

Oh, very much. And now we can share that information with millions of people. We don't have to hold a press conference, we can put it on social media and share these stories directly – and often. The public has to hear a message something like nine times before they really remember it.

And what is the story you wished more people knew about Livestrong?

That you can reach out to us, that you don't have to go through a cancer diagnosis, whether it's you, a family member, a spouse, a friend, a child – you don't have to go through it alone. If you're a young couple that faces fertility issues because of a cancer diagnosis, or if you've just gotten a new job, how do you handle that?

We're here to help make that journey easier, to provide answers, help you with the anxiety you feel, the stress you have. We are always here to pick up the phone, to answer an email, to support cancer patients and survivors as best we can.

EDWARD STEPHENS is Deputy Editor of the *Brunswick Review*, based in New York.

GREG LEE

President of Livestrong Foundation, Greg Lee has worked for 25 years in the nonprofit sector.

Lee was previously the Manager of Finance and Administration for The University of Texas Investment Management Company, a nonprofit that managed more than \$21 billion in investments, and also Vice President of Finance and Business Operations for the American Heart Association.



JAN. 2013

Appearing on TV's *The Oprah Winfrey Show*, Lance Armstrong confesses to using banned substances while racing

Nike formally ends its relationship with the foundation

DEC. 2013



OCT. 2014

Livestrong agrees to a \$50 million donation, given over 10 years, to the new medical school at The University of Texas at Austin for a cancer care center

Greg Lee, CFO of Livestrong for 10 years, becomes the organization's President

JAN. 2016



OCT. 2016

Livestrong Fertility surpasses 7,500 people served, covering more than \$32 million in related expenses. Above: Wendy Stively, an LF beneficiary, with her daughter, Emilie