

## RESEARCHER PROFILE: Yael Vodovotz, PhD

# Researcher Rides in Memory and in Gratitude



**Yael Vodovotz, PhD**, an OSUCCC – James researcher, has ridden in Pelotonia every year since the event began in 2009, except for last year when she had to participate as a virtual rider.

Vodovotz will be riding in Pelotonia 17 also, and this year's event will be particularly poignant for her. "My dad succumbed to lung cancer in May, after a courageous three-and-a-half year fight," she says.

"It's been a difficult time for my family. But it's also been inspirational. I heard amazing stories from the researchers, caregivers and physicians who were involved in my dad's care. Their love and dedication to him was more than I could ever have predicted.

"It is for my dad AND for all those wonderful people that I ride this year, and I'm doing it with added enthusiasm to raise funds for cancer research," says

Vodovotz, a physical chemist and food scientist in the Department of Food Science and Technology.

Earlier in her career, Vodovotz worked for NASA, formulating foods for the mission to Mars. There, she began developing a soy bread high in bioactive substances, a project she completed when she moved to Ohio State and joined the

OSUCCC – James. This soy bread and an offshoot soy-almond bread were used in a clinical trial for the prevention of prostate cancer.

More recently, she and a group of multidisciplinary colleagues at Ohio State's Crops to Clinic program developed a black raspberry confection, which will be handed out at the James Cancer Hospital and Solove Research Institute tent during the opening ceremony of this year's Pelotonia.

"We have studied these confections extensively in our lab for their bioactivity and health-promoting properties, and they've undergone several human clinical trials with promising results," she says.

In 2015, Vodovotz teamed with chef Drew Patterson, who runs the Bloch Café on the 14th floor of The James, to sell the dark-chocolate-wrapped black raspberry confection, first at that restaurant, then at other Ohio State locations.

"The confection is made locally in Columbus, with profits supporting further functional food research at The Ohio State University," Vodovotz says.

Sales were good, so Vodovotz and Patterson formed a company called Foods For Purpose, and they will soon begin selling the confection outside of Ohio State. Part of the profits from the sales will continue to support research into the development of health-promoting foods high in bioactive compounds.

"This project would not have gotten off the ground without support from Pelotonia," Vodovotz adds.

"Pelotonia is an amazing event," she says. "It sometimes takes quite a bit to raise the donations, but it's for a good cause. And it all comes together that weekend.

"Most importantly, I'm doing this for my dad and to support cancer research. I hope that future patients won't go through what he went through, particularly those with lung cancer.

"I also want to extend thanks to all the researchers doing the work, and to the physicians and nurses who treated him so well," says Vodovotz, whose father was treated at a cancer center in Florida. "They are great people." ■