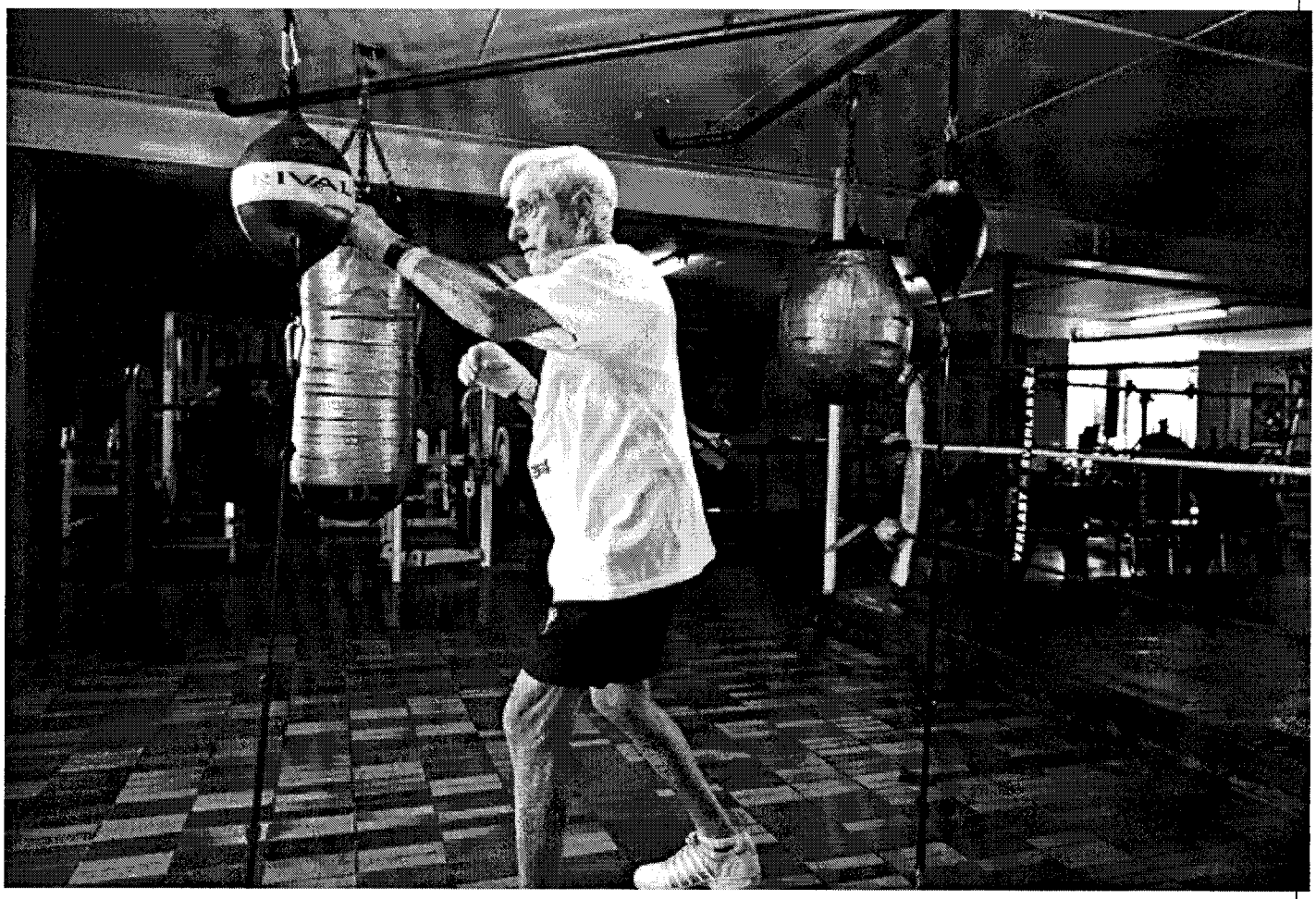
Why I Donate: In The Ring With Hugh Mccoll

Posted By Dawna Freeman On September 1, 2011 @ 12:13 am In Features | No Comments

Prostate cancer may have thrown him the first punch fifteen years ago, but in May, the month he turned 90, Hugh McColl came back with a knockout punch that will help future cancer patients around the world.

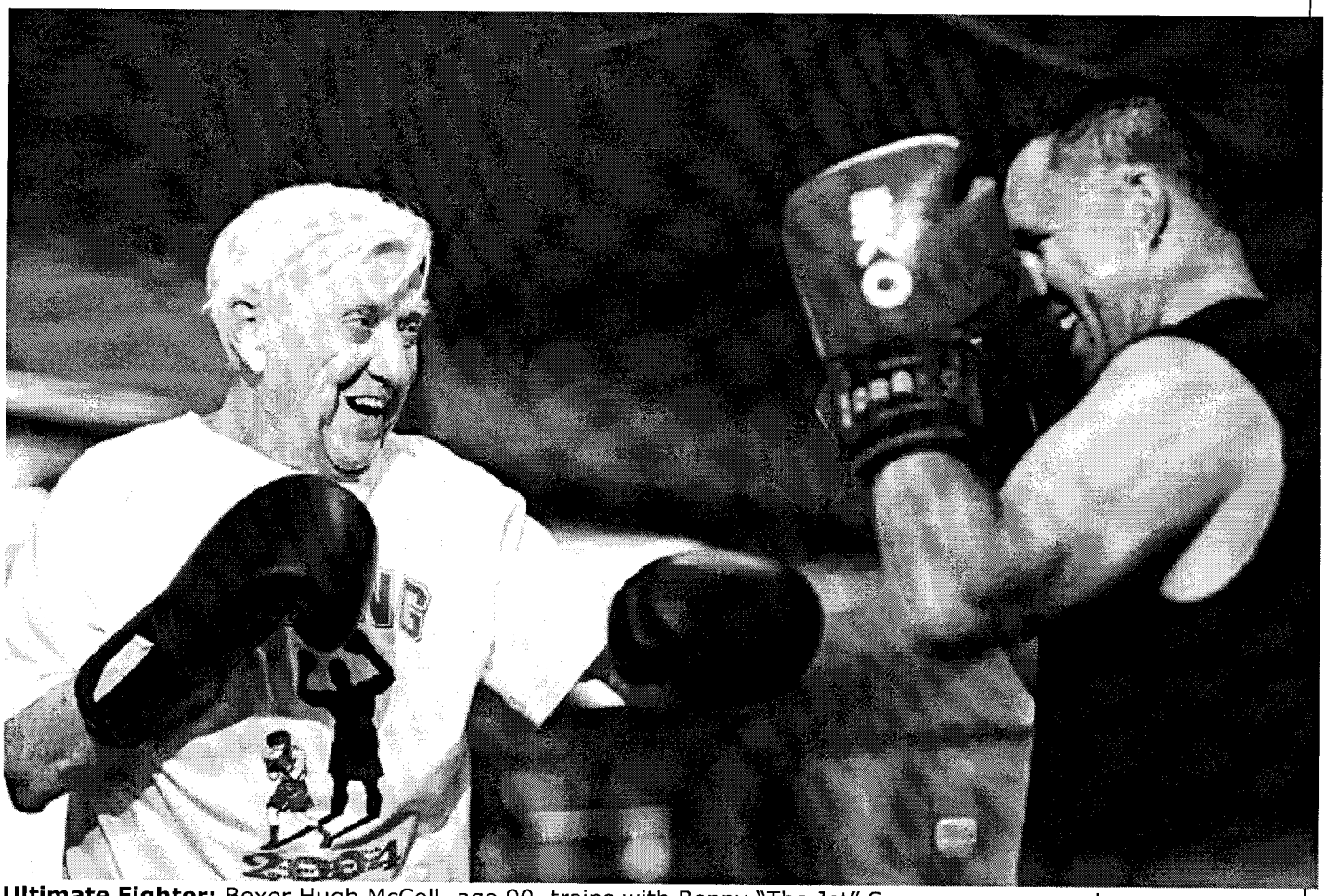


It was when the retired owner of Southpark Motors was at the Cross Cancer Institute in Edmonton for a checkup that he learned about some ground-breaking developments in radiation therapy. Down in the basement at the Cross, a team of medical physicists had created the world's first prototype of a machine that could capture an image of a cancerous tumour and treat it with radiation at the same time.

Radiation therapy is a proven treatment for nearly half of all cancers, but currently it takes two separate machines to treat a patient – one to take a picture of the location of the tumour and the other to deliver the beam of radiation. But between taking a 2D X-ray image and treating it, the tumour's shape and even location can change. To account for the shift in organs and tissues – even breathing means movement during treatment – doctors radiate a small area of healthy tissue around the cancer to ensure they reach the whole tumour. Because damage to the healthy tissue can cause unwanted side effects, the dose of radiation is lowered, and multiple treatments are required to kill the cancer cells.

Hugh, who was left with serious side effects after 36 radiation treatments, asked to meet the Alberta Cancer Foundation researcher and his team of medical physicists who had discovered how to treat cancer with fewer treatments and potentially fewer side effects.

In December 2008, Dr. Gino Fallone and his team had become the first in the world to prove their head prototype machine, called a Linac-MR, could successfully take real-time 3D MR (magnetic resonance) images of a solid tumour while delivering radiation. Seeing the tumour more clearly, even if it shifts during treatment, meant doctors could deliver higher, more precise doses of radiation in fewer treatments.



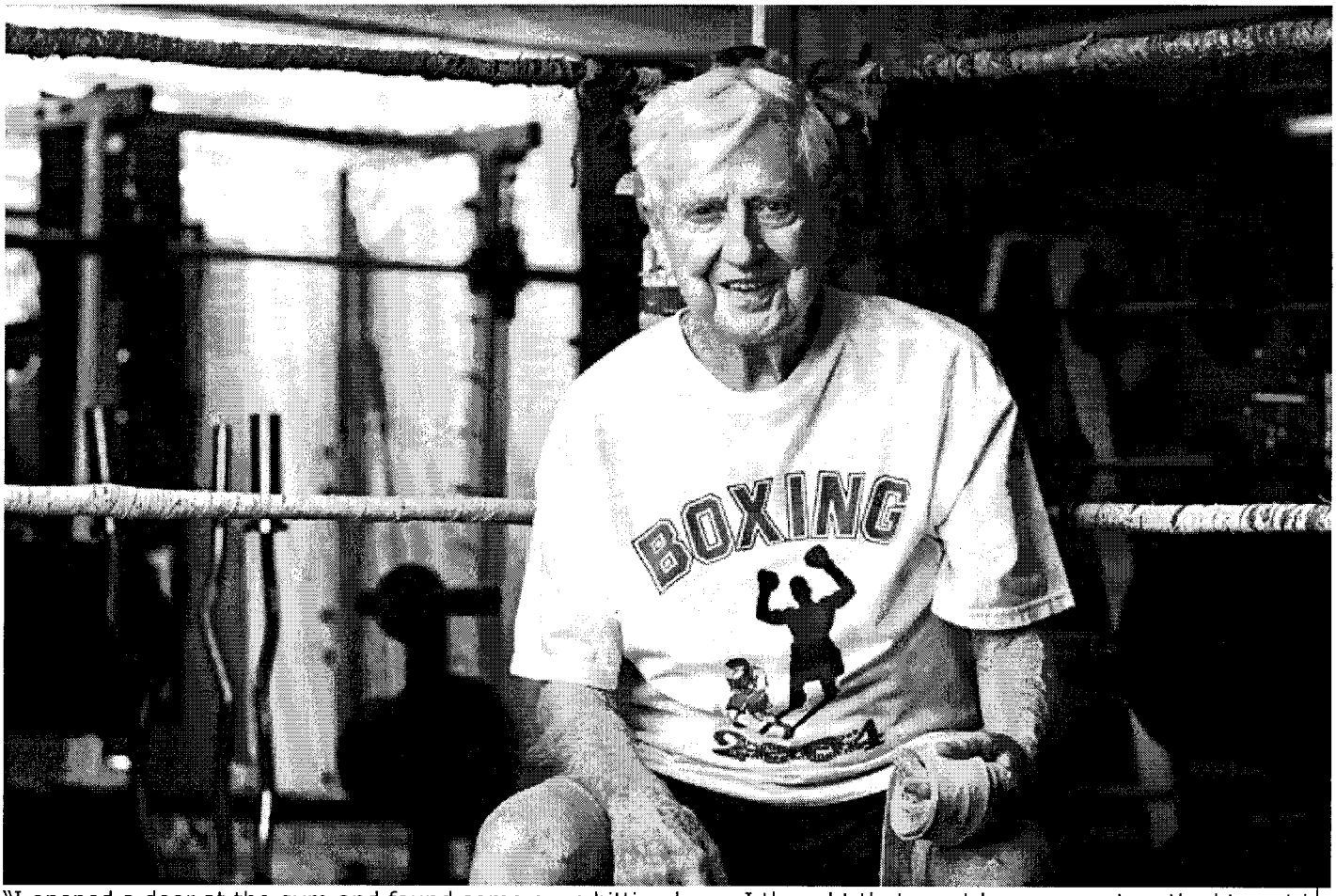
Ultimate Fighter: Boxer Hugh McColl, age 90, trains with Benny "The Jet" Swanson every week.

"It's exciting technology that will revolutionize radiation therapy," says Dr. Fallone, whose team is now creating a prototype machine that will look at the whole body. "Because of this new hybrid system, we can cure the cancer much better and potentially with decreased side effects." He says the discovery could also make radiation therapy more accessible for tumours in the liver, stomach and pancreas, areas which are not normally treated with radiation because of organ movement.

Hugh and his wife Madge, who has faced breast cancer, knew too well the importance of accuracy in radiation treatments to reduce the risk of serious side effects. "We were privileged to meet Dr. Fallone and felt it was very timely and very important to support his work. This will make a difference in the future."

The McColls have promised $500,000 to the Alberta Cancer Foundation, with half to go to prostate cancer research and half to the Linac-MR fundraising campaign. Follow-ing an initial donation of $200,000 in May, they will
give $100,000 toward the projects each year for the next three years.

"We are grateful to Hugh and Madge for their gift, which brought our campaign to just over $2 million of our $4 million goal," says Jane Weller, senior development officer for the Alberta Cancer Foundation at the Cross Cancer Institute. "These campaign donations will help to build the human or whole-body prototype and begin clinical trials to test on patients."



"I opened a door at the gym and found some guys hitting bags. I thought that must be one great method to get in shape, and decided I wanted to train with guys who are fighters."

The McColls didn't always have this much money to give, but they always gave. From the time they arrived from Toronto and took over the General Motors dealership on Whyte Avenue in 1953, the McColls took an active role in their new city, supporting Edmonton's sick and disadvantaged children, youth, men and women. Madge has volunteered tirelessly for her church and, for 30 years, has helped raise funds for the Grandview Continuing Care Centre. While president of the South Kiwanis Club in the early 1950s, Hugh was involved in the start of Camp He Ho Ha for handicapped children. He helped start the city's first crisis intervention line and the organization now known as Goodwill. The year he was awarded $5,000 from an auto industry association, he and Madge gave half to the Youth Emergency Shelter and the other half to Win House.

Hugh explains they always felt it was important to recognize the needs of others and donate to charities every year. "We enjoyed a great deal of success in business and made many friends – including people who were ill and handicapped," he says, "and we wanted to support all kinds of organizations annually throughout our career."

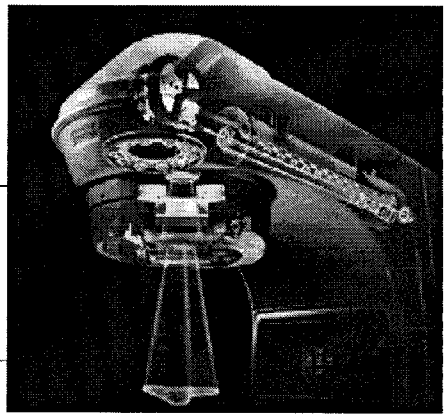
These days, Hugh works out at Edmonton's Panther Gym under personal trainer and gym owner Benny "The Jet" Swanson every week. But he was Johnny-come-lately in boxing, discovering his new sport in Hawaii at the age of 75. "I opened a door at the gym and found some guys hitting bags. I thought that must be one great method to get in shape, and decided I wanted to train with guys who are fighters."

Now 15 years past cancer treatments and into retirement, Hugh and Madge McColl enjoy their various activities, and their four kids, 10 grandchildren and six great-grandchildren in good health.

Dream Machine

Dr. Gino Fallone's challenge has been to get an MRI machine and a linear accelerator to work in concert. "The radio frequency and magnetic fields from each were not compatible with the other," says Fallone. "We have completely redesigned the system from the bottom-up and have resolved these issues."

The Alberta Cancer Foundation has contributed more than $3 million to Dr. Fallone's research into image-guided adaptive radiotherapy, and committed in 2010 to providing $4 million to the Linac-MR Project over the next three years to develop a whole-body prototype to test on patients at the Cross Cancer Institute. Regulatory clearance will then be obtained to allow for use on research patients.



For more information about the Linac-MR Project go to **www.linacmr.ca** [1]. From there, you can navigate to the Alberta Cancer Foundation to make an online donation.

Article printed from Alberta Cancer Foundation:
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[1] **www.linacmr.ca**: **http://www.linacmr.ca**