

2023  
ANNUAL REPORT

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“I want to be remembered as just a guy who was interested in the golden thread of humanity that intertwines us all together.”

JOHN RITTER

20  
YEARS

2023  
ANNUAL REPORT

CHECK OUT  
OUR TIMELINE >>>



**TWENTY YEARS OF  
HONORING JOHN'S LEGACY**



**MISSION**

To raise awareness of thoracic aortic aneurysm and dissection through research, education, and advocacy.



**VISION**

To make aortic health a routine part of the patient and doctor conversation.



**PURPOSE**

To prevent unnecessary suffering because of the unknown.

AWARENESS  
SUPPORT  
RESEARCH  
EDUCATION  
ADVOCACY



Aortic Dissection  
Awareness Week

Save the Date  
September 15-21, 2024



THROUGHOUT AORTIC DISSECTION  
AWARENESS WEEK THE JRF RAISED: \$47,204

**Public Service Announcement (PSA):**

52,500,000 Listeners  
3,645 Station Airings

**Social Media Numbers:**

1,520,725 Total Reach

## SPREAD AWARENESS

A public service announcement on thoracic aortic dissection, narrated by Amy Yasbeck, aired on thousands of radio stations, and reached millions of listeners as part of Aortic Dissection Awareness Week.

Aortic dissection knows no boundaries, affecting people of all ages, genders, and ethnicities. Throughout this past year, The JRF shared impactful patient and family stories with clinicians at conferences, aortic clinics across the country, and during our educational programs.

\$1 MILLION RAISED IN THE  
2022-2023 FISCAL YEAR

## COMMUNITY SUPPORT

**Life with Aortic Disease: Caring for Your Mental Health**, a free book, was made available this year through The JRF. Over 700 copies have been distributed. Related research on the effectiveness of mental health interventions for aortic patients is ongoing.

Funding from The JRF enabled the Aortic Dissection Collaborative for Patient-Centered Research to continue its work. The Collaborative has assembled a broad network of stakeholders who are well-informed about aortic dissection and patient-centered outcomes research, in order to guide research prioritization and eventual development.



THOUSANDS OF INQUIRIES THROUGH  
THE WEBSITE AND OTHER CHANNELS  
WERE ANSWERED BY THE JRF

“Funding from the JRF allowed my lab to generate preliminary data and organize an international collaborative network to define the molecular triggers for acute aortic dissections, with the goal of identifying drugs to block these dissections. We went on to receive a 7.5 million dollar Leducq Foundation award, indicating a large return on investment for JRF research funding.”

**Dianna Milewicz, MD, PhD**  
Director, The John Ritter Research Program  
University of Texas Health  
Science Center at Houston

\$350,000 ALLOCATED FOR  
RESEARCH GRANTS FOR THE  
2022-2023 FISCAL YEAR

## RESEARCH

Over the past year, The JRF funded an extension for the first clinical trial investigating the safety of exercise in patients with aortic dissection, supported research to develop an evidence-based diagnostic tool for aortic dissection, and initiated the first phase of a clinical trial for a drug with the potential to be the first treatment for a rare, childhood-onset genetic disorder.

In 2024, we plan to expand our funding scope even further. We remain committed to maintaining over a decade of financial support for the John Ritter Research Program for Aortic and Vascular Diseases, led by Dr. Dianna Milewicz. Her groundbreaking efforts in identifying the genetic causes of aortic dissection provide answers to families and contribute significantly to saving lives.

OVER THE PAST 20 YEARS, THE JRF HAS FUNDED  
MORE THAN \$1.5 MILLION IN RESEARCH

10 WEBINARS COVERING DIVERSE TOPICS WERE PRESENTED BY LEADING EXPERTS IN THORACIC AORTIC DISEASE

## WIDESPREAD EDUCATION

Aortic dissections can largely be prevented if individuals at risk are identified early. We were privileged this year to share this message with surgeons, cardiologists, and other medical professionals who care for thoracic aortic disease patients.

We have expanded the offerings of the Aorta Academy, our virtual library of resources, to ensure that the latest recommendations and knowledge are readily available to all members of our community. Look for our content to grow even more next year.

“The JRF is a trusted organization that achieves tangible results, serving as a beacon of hope for aortic disease.”

**Meg Boeglin, BSN, RN**  
Clinical Nurse Navigator  
Hoag Heart & Vascular Institute

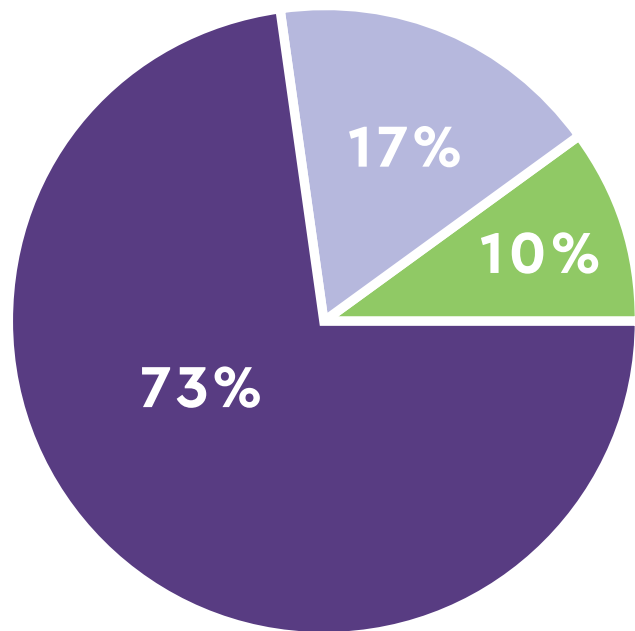


## ADVOCACY IN ACTION

In June of 2023, we gathered at Camp Purpose in Colorado for an intensive training program with the inaugural class of 20 Aorta Advocate volunteers, each personally connected to aortic disease. Over three days, advocates underwent comprehensive instruction in peer support, responsible resource navigation, and self-advocacy within medical environments. These volunteers are now actively serving our community, bringing diverse experiences and backgrounds to enrich our outreach efforts.

“The John Ritter Foundation has been an invaluable resource for patients and families who are looking to connect with a community of people with shared aortic experiences.”

**Annie C. Yu, ANP-BC**  
Chief Nurse Practitioner, Aortic Center  
Columbia University Irving Medical Center



## 2023 FINANCIALS

**PROGRAMS:** **\$824,858**

Education \$252,427

Research \$394,065

Awareness \$178,366

**FUNDRAISING:** **\$188,555**

**OPERATIONAL:** **\$120,601**

**TOTAL BUDGET:** **\$1,134,014**



## GIVE FROM THE HEART

Contributions to The JRF support grants for research, family support programs like our Aorta Advocates, educational forums and webinars, publications, fundraising activities, and administrative expenses to keep the organization moving forward.





**Dianna Milewicz, MD, PhD**  
Chairman  
The University of Texas Health  
Science Center at Houston

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**Are You Looking For Support?**

If you or someone you love needs support on their aortic journey, email [info@JohnRitterFoundation.org](mailto:info@JohnRitterFoundation.org) or visit [www.JohnRitterFoundation.org/aorta-advocates](http://www.JohnRitterFoundation.org/aorta-advocates). The Aorta Advocate program provides peer-to-peer support and is made possible by contributions from our generous donors.

“Words cannot describe what The John Ritter Foundation has done for me and thank you for allowing me to be part of this great family.”

**Michael Ross, Sr.**  
Dissection Survivor

# CONTACT US

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As 2023 draws to a close, we reflect on the immense impact The John Ritter Foundation for Aortic Health (The JRF) has had over the past twenty years. Born out of tragedy and a yearning to amplify John’s legacy, The JRF has grown to be a major force in the world of aortic health.

In this past fiscal year, we’ve reached new heights by adding valuable programming and hitting a new fundraising milestone. Through events, donations, grants, and generous individual gifts, we’ve raised more than \$1 million. Our community has continued to grow with us and support us through the gifts of their talent, treasure, and time.

None of this would be possible without the devoted support of our staff, board of directors, professional advisory board, volunteers, donors, and YOU. We cannot wait to see what the coming years will bring.

# THANK YOU FROM THE TOP OF OUR HEARTS



**AMY YASBECK & MEREDITH FORD O’NEAL**

2003

The John Ritter Foundation for Aortic Health (JRF) is established by Amy Yasbeck after the death of her husband, John Ritter.

2010

The **Ritter Rules** are published.

2021

During Aortic Dissection Awareness Week, The JRF debuted the **Purple Promise** social media campaign.

2022

Partnered with the American College of Emergency Physicians to develop the "**Ritter Score**" which will aid emergency physicians in the diagnosis of aortic dissection.

2012

**Team Ritter** ran the NYC Marathon for the first time which becomes a cornerstone event for years to come.

Dr. Dianna Milewicz created the **John Ritter Research Program in Aortic and Vascular Diseases** at UTHealth. As of 2023, over **1500** families are enrolled in this groundbreaking genetic research study.

2023

As a resource for aortic patients and caregivers, The JRF funded the development of the resource book "Life with Aortic Disease: Caring for your Mental Health."

Trained and launched the inaugural class of Aorta Advocates, 20 volunteers who are ready and prepared to guide and support others on their aortic journeys.

2016

JRF funded research led to the identification of the **LOX gene** as a cause of aortic dissection.

In collaboration with investigators in Asia, Australia, and Europe, Dr. Milewicz's team published the **largest ever cohort** of patients with TGFBR1 and TGFBR2 variants.

2018

ACTA2 smooth muscle dysfunction syndrome (SMDS) management recommendations are published with JRF funding. These are the **first ever guidelines** for this severe and early onset disease.



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