

# Fulfilling His Daughter's Final Wish

**This VFW Post in California has helped raise more than \$100,000 toward treating pancreatic cancer.**

**BY ISMAEL RODRIGUEZ JR.**

Alex Athans remembers that day six years ago when his daughter, Christina, first urged him to do something. It was March 4, 2014, and Alex's wife, Pat, had walked out of Christina's room at Huntington Memorial Hospital in Pasadena, Calif., to get food.

Six years have passed since that day, but the conversation remains vivid in Athans' mind. He recalls pulling up a chair and sitting at his 42-year-old daughter's bedside.

"Dad, I want to talk to you," his daughter began. "Let's face it. We're not in Disneyland here. You and I both know I am going to die from this cancer."

As the Vietnam War veteran followed his daughter's every word, Christina, who was in the terminal stages of pancreatic cancer, made her final request.

"What I would like is for people to donate money in place of flowers to help find a cure so others don't have to suffer like you and mom," she told him.

After Christina passed away three days later, the Athans family began carrying out their daughter's dying wish — one that has since raised \$103,629 for pancreatic cancer research and awareness.

"What we've accomplished so far is remarkable, but we're not alone," said Athans, a life member and quartermaster of VFW Post 12114 in Tehachapi, Calif., about 115 miles north of Los Angeles. "This wouldn't have been possible without the support, effort and dedication of every single member of Post 12114."

With support from his fellow Post

members, Athans and his wife created a webpage through the Pancreatic Cancer Action Network (PanCan) to begin receiving donations on behalf of Christina.

"When this all began, Christina's page ranked 2,267th," Athans said. "With the help of our community and others chipping in from across the country, her page now ranks first."

Most of the donations are either received online or via checks paid out to Post 12114, which then donates 100 percent of the money to PanCan for research.

To date, the Post has received money from individuals in more than 21 states, which notably includes a \$5,000 check from a person in Wisconsin in the spring of 2019.

Post 12114 also hosts annual fundraisers in Tehachapi, a tradition that began when the family first auctioned off Christina's property following her funeral in 2014.

With annual donations from local businesses and a five-month advertising campaign each year that targets Tehachapi and the surrounding areas via newspapers and radio stations, Post 12114 has raised more than \$56,000 locally, according to Athans.

"It's through the businesses and people of Tehachapi, members of our Post, family and friends that we continue to wage hope in finding a cure," Athans said. "They've become heroes."

Athans, however, encourages VFW Posts across the country to become more proactive in helping fight cancer.

"We sent out emails and letters to all Posts in California to donate at least \$5 each, and that's all we got — \$5 from just one Post," Athans said. "But we're not discouraged. We challenge all Posts across the nation to simply donate \$5 to help us find a cure."

For more information, visit Christina's webpage at [support.pancan.org/goto/athans](http://support.pancan.org/goto/athans).

EMAIL [irodriguez@vfw.org](mailto:irodriguez@vfw.org)



Alex Athans, center, presents a check in December to representatives of the Pancreatic Cancer Action Network (PanCan) in Manhattan Beach, Calif. Athans, a life member and quartermaster of VFW Post 12114 in Tehachapi, Calif., lost his daughter, Christina, to pancreatic cancer in 2014. Since her passing, Athans, with help from Post 12114, has raised \$103,629 for pancreatic cancer research and awareness. Athans also encourages other Posts across the country to help fight cancer by donating just \$5.