

Local Woman will Celebrate Breast Cancer Survival Anniversary at Race for the Cure



One year ago, at the age of 55, Pam Iberer was in the throes of chemotherapy treatments for breast cancer. A routine mammogram had detected a suspicious tumor in December of 2012; follow up tests revealed that Pam had stage two breast cancer. Although she told her husband immediately, she was reluctant to share the news with her adult children

around the holidays. When she learned at Christmas that her daughter was expecting a child, Pam was inspired to survive for the sake of her unborn grandchild. Over the course of the next several months, Pam endured surgery, four rounds of chemotherapy, and 35 radiation treatments. She also became involved in raising funds for breast cancer research and education. In fact, Pam was so determined to participate in the Race for the Cure® on behalf of the Komen for the Cure® North Jersey Affiliate, that her oncologist suggested that she postpone her final chemotherapy treatment by one week so that she could complete the walk. Pam jubilantly crossed the finish line, and the next day she received her last round of chemotherapy. "I didn't get out of bed until Mother's Day!" she says jokingly now.

Breast cancer strikes more than 211,000 women each year, and in 2009, the year that the most recent statistics are available, more than 40,000 women died as a result. Breast cancer is often a silent disease, with virtually no symptoms, but it is often completely curable if diagnosed in its early stages. The majority of those diagnosed with breast cancer each year have no family history of the disease, making it all the more important for women to get an annual mammogram. According to data compiled recently by the Komen for the Cure® North Jersey Affiliate, almost 33% of women over the age of 40 who reside in Sussex County have not had a mammogram in the past year, a percentage which is marginally better than some of the other counties in the agency's 9-county service area in northern New Jersey. However, Sussex County has the highest incidence of incurable breast cancer in the state, primarily because the cancer is not being detected at its earliest, most curable, stage. The average 5-year mortality rate across all ethnic groups in Sussex County is 33.4%, almost 7 percentage points higher than the 9-county average of 26.5%.

Early detection is essential in the fight against breast cancer; the survival rate for women who detected breast cancer in its earliest stages has reached 98%. A mammogram is 85% - 90% effective at detecting breast cancer. Mammograms may detect breast cancer up to two years before they can be felt through clinical or self-examinations. Recent studies have shown that mammography can reduce the chances of death from breast cancer by 30%. Early diagnosis is the key to a cure, and urging women to get a mammogram can be the difference between life and death.

These days, Pam is enjoying the time she has with her family, particularly her new granddaughter who was born in June, 2014. "She was my inspiration. She is everything to me." Pam notes that the support of her family helped her recovery. "Everyone was supportive. My husband, my kids, my grandsons, my daughter-in-law, my son-in-law. They

helped me get through the whole thing."

The experience of having cancer has changed Pam dramatically. "It really changed my theory on life. I don't sweat the small things. I'm lucky."

Pam speaks freely about her diagnosis and her follow-up chemotherapy and radiation treatments. "I can't change what happened to me, I just had to deal with it. I told myself to suck it up and do it." She also recommends mammograms, "It's worth a little discomfort to make sure that you are healthy. I know mammograms save lives because obviously a mammogram saved mine. If everybody thought of breast cancer as a disease which was preventable attitudes would change."

Pam is gearing up to walk for Team Project Self-Sufficiency in the 2014 Race for the Cure® on Sunday, May 4th. Her determination to survive led Pam to be the top fundraiser for the team in last year's Race. "I just decided that I need to be involved. I have to fundraise for this." She noted that this year's 5K Race/Walk falls on the one-year anniversary of her last round of chemotherapy.

Area residents who would like to join Pam and Team Project Self-Sufficiency in the seventh annual Susan G. Komen North Jersey Race for the Cure® at the Essex County South Mountain Recreation Complex in West Orange on Sunday, May 4th, are encouraged to register online at www.komenorthjersey.org/race and click on Team Project Self-Sufficiency. For those in need of transportation, a bus will leave the Newton campus promptly at 7:15 a.m. The bus ride is free and open to the public, but registration is required by calling 973-940-3500.

Free mammograms will be offered to underinsured and uninsured women over the age of 40 on Thursday, May 29th, from 10:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m. at Project Self-Sufficiency, thanks to the support of the Susan G. Komen for the Cure North Jersey®. To conduct the tests, two technicians with a state-of-the-art mammography machine set up shop at the agency's Community Education Center. Women are examined discreetly and their test results are made available within days. In the past few years, hundreds of women have received free mammograms through the program at Project Self-Sufficiency.

Women who are interested in receiving a free mammogram are encouraged to call the agency at 973-940-3500 to make an appointment. Free mammograms and pap tests are also available through the New Jersey Cancer Education and Early Detection (NJCEED) program administered by the Sussex County Health Department. Follow-up diagnostics, including additional mammography views, breast ultrasounds, and biopsies are available to women who are screened at Project Self-Sufficiency. Interested participants are encouraged to call 973-579-0750, ext. 1246. In addition, Newton Medical Center will provide a free mammogram for women who qualify through the Newton Medical Center Foundation's "Mammograms Save Lives" program. Those without health insurance are encouraged to contact Newton Medical Center's Education/Outreach office at 973-579-8340 for more information.

