

Breast Cancer Survivor Relies on Faith to See Her Through



Thirty years passed between the time a screening mammogram detected irregular cells in one of Sussex County resident Barb Brady's breasts and the discovery of a cancerous mass. During that time, Brady raised six children and welcomed nine

grandchildren while pursuing a career as a flight attendant. She was scrupulous about her health, exercising regularly, following a nutritious diet and obtaining routine mammograms. At the age of 62, a lump in her left breast was detected during an annual check-up; Brady was ultimately diagnosed with two different types of cancer, one in each breast. By that time the disease had also invaded her lymph nodes.

Breast cancer is often a silent disease, with virtually no symptoms, but it is often completely curable if diagnosed in its early stages. In 1980, the national five-year survival rate for women diagnosed with early stage breast cancer was about 74%; today that number is 99%. There are currently more than 3.1 million breast cancer survivors in the United States. One out of eight women will develop breast cancer, yet about 85% of these women have no family history of the disease.

According to the New Jersey Department of Health, breast cancer is the most common cancer diagnosed among New Jersey women and the second leading cause of death, after lung cancer, attributed to cancer in the state. In 2015, 7,584 New Jersey women were diagnosed with breast cancer. The rate at which new cases of breast cancer are being diagnosed in Sussex County, as well as in the rest of the state, is stable, according to the National Cancer Institute and the Centers for Disease Control. The county's breast cancer death rate is also falling, in accordance with state and national trends. However, the disease contributes to the death of 1,300 New Jersey women annually. Access to breast cancer screenings and optimal treatments is an urgent public health issue.

Brady immediately embarked on a grueling odyssey through multiple surgeries and hospitalizations, followed by chemotherapy and radiation treatments. After the initial shock wore off, Brady began to formulate a plan for

breaking the news to her family and friends. "When you find out the reality of your treatment plan, you get ready for battle," explains Brady, who added, "When I went public with my diagnosis, I asked everyone for prayer and that helped me through."

Brady's attention to fitness and nutrition over the years paid off during her treatment and recovery. She walked a mile every day and stuck to a healthy diet. "I did a lot of research. I knew what I had to drink and what I had to eat."

Brady experienced her share of negative side effects from the chemotherapy drugs and the radiation, but she was bolstered by support from her family, her friends and her faith. "My faith was what got me through. God answered my prayers: Cards came pouring in, along with text messages and visits from my friends and my kids, and that gave me strength." She also credits her husband, Mike, for his unflagging support. "I look at every day as a gift. I try to really enjoy the moment and love the people I am with. I have a beautiful life."

She is a relentless advocate for screening mammograms and annual check-ups. "There are a lot of resources out there for women. Cancer can happen to anybody. You just have to make time to get a mammogram."

Free Breast Health Services Available

The New Jersey Cancer Education and Early Detection (NJ CEED) Program, with funding from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and the State of New Jersey, provides funding to all twenty-one counties in the State for comprehensive breast, cervical, prostate, and colorectal cancer education, outreach, and screening. Men and women whose income is under 250% of the Federal poverty level and have no insurance are eligible for the program. Free mammograms and pap tests are also available through the NJ CEED program; follow-up diagnostics, including additional mammography views, breast ultrasounds, and biopsies can also be provided. Interested participants are encouraged to call 973-579-0570, extension 1246 or 1248. 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.

