

Breast Cancer Survivor Celebrates 80th Birthday



Ten years ago, Sussex County resident Rhoda Seider celebrated her 70th birthday with her first radiation treatment for breast cancer. The disease had been detected with a routine mammogram, which Seider had been receiving annually for almost 30 years. Seider was able to forgo chemotherapy treatments and extensive surgery because the breast cancer was detected at a very early stage. “We

caught it early, it made a difference in the treatment I received, and I walked away knowing that I was going to be okay.” This month, Seider will be celebrating 80 years of life coupled with ten years of surviving breast cancer. “The eightieth birthday is a milestone, but for me there is something kind of sweet and wonderfully important that it is also ten years since I was diagnosed with breast cancer,” added Seider. “I am extremely healthy and I am feeling good.”

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 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.

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 practice effective early detection techniques, such as annual mammograms and self-exams. 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.

Seider is actively involved in many ways at Project Self-Sufficiency, a local non-profit organization which assists families in Sussex, Warren and Hunterdon counties. She serves as Treasurer of the non-profit agency’s Board of Directors and can often be found tending one of the institution’s many community gardens, planning fundraising events, or participating in education projects at the on-site childcare facility. She is also an enthusiastic participant in the breast health education programs offered by Project Self-Sufficiency, noting that she tries to continuously update herself about current trends in breast cancer treatment. “When the ‘C-word’ enters your life, you pay much closer attention to it. I still try to learn about new medical strategies. I attend the Breast Cancer Survivor Event at Project Self-Sufficiency every year and I listen carefully to the panel discussion with the doctors. I am encouraged that they are learning much more than they knew when I was diagnosed, and I am happy for the people who are reaping the benefits.”

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%.

Seider is a strong advocate for the use of mammography as a tool for early detection. She continues to encourage her adult daughter and other family members to be vigilant about receiving annual mammograms. “My daughter is very careful about getting a mammogram on a regular basis. Everybody knows their risk factors. I have had really good care and I know what things I should be doing, and one of them is getting regular mammograms.”

Free mammograms will be offered at Project Self-Sufficiency on Thursday, June 16th, from 10:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m. Mammograms will be available by appointment to underinsured or uninsured women over the age of 40; some income-eligibility guidelines apply. To make an appointment for a free mammogram at Project Self-Sufficiency, interested women are invited to call 973-940-3500 or 844-807-3500.

Project Self-Sufficiency is currently searching for Sussex County breast cancer survivors who would be willing to be profiled as part of the Mammograms Save Lives campaign. Their story would appear in the *New Jersey Herald* and on the Project Self-Sufficiency website. Interested participants are urged to call Project Self-Sufficiency at 973-940-3500 or 844-807-3500.

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 973-579-0750, 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.

