

Breast Cancer Survivor Takes Solace in Helping Others



Retired educator Jeanne Heinke has been vigilant about receiving regular screening mammograms ever since an annual test detected a mass in one of her breasts several years ago. The mammograms, coupled with ultrasounds and MRI's, became a regular routine for Heinke whose dense breast tissue called for more complex monitoring procedures. Test after test showed no change in the mass until late 2015, when a biopsy detected that the

mass had become malignant. Surgery was scheduled and additional analysis was conducted to determine the next course of action. While she was waiting for the test results, Heinke received a surprise gift of a trip to a California resort. She recognizes that not every cancer patient can take advantage of a similar offer, but she advises that any form of stress relief is called for, "Give yourself a little break. It doesn't have to be elaborate. I will never forget that trip for the rest of my life." Shortly thereafter, Heinke learned that her particular diagnosis did not require chemotherapy treatments. Instead, she embarked on a regimen of daily radiation treatments and drug therapy.

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.

Heinke has lost several family members to cancer. However, 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.

Heinke was deeply impacted by the compassionate staff at the cancer treatment facility and by the situation faced by her fellow patients. She was taken aback by the sheer number of people who required assistance each time that she visited. "It was packed! I was so upset that there were so many people sitting there." She adds that the fact that she did not require chemotherapy treatments gave her mixed feelings. "I felt so blessed, it almost made me feel guilty."

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%.

Now that Heinke has moved on, she has found solace in nature and in assisting others. "I am fortunate to live where there are woods around me." She spends a lot of time outdoors and is catching up on reading poetry. "I've enjoyed this sense of calm that has come over me. I make a conscious effort to think of others. Every day I find something to do outside of my realm. It takes the focus off of me and it got me through." Heinke has written notes to other patients, baked cookies and purchased small gifts for friends and family. She remains active in her church and in the local Historical Society. "Once you have something like this happen, your life changes. Everything becomes sweeter and has more meaning. Surviving cancer has made me a better person, and brought out qualities in me that make me understand that everybody's got a story and has something that they are living with."

Free mammograms will be offered at Project Self-Sufficiency on Thursday, September 30th, 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.

