

## Breast Cancer Patient Describes Herself as “Lucky”



Sussex County resident Clara Kane counts herself as one of the lucky ones, despite having been diagnosed with breast cancer three years ago. Unlike many others who are diagnosed with breast cancer, Clara did not find

a lump, undergo a mastectomy, require chemotherapy, or even have any discomfort which led to her diagnosis. Instead, a small drop of blood in the shower caused her to visit several different doctors, one of whom eventually provided a diagnosis of Stage Zero breast cancer. “I thought it was a bug bite, but it was breast cancer,” commented Clara ruefully.

Having had an aunt who was diagnosed with breast cancer, Clara had always been proactive about receiving annual mammograms. Ironically, the mammogram prescribed by Clara’s doctor after she discovered that her breast had been bleeding was not able to detect the breast cancer lurking there. It took an ultrasound to detect the minute presence of cancer. Breast cancer strikes more than 200,000 women each year, and in 2007, 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. 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. In fact, while the mortality rate for breast cancer in the state of New Jersey dropped -8.9% from 1997 to 2005, mortality in Sussex County rose +9.5% during the same period.

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.

Following her diagnosis, Clara underwent a lumpectomy followed by 17 weeks of radiation treatment. She currently takes the anti-cancer medication tamoxifen and has experienced no lasting side effects, nor has there been any recurrence of the disease. “It was an experience to go through, but life goes on. I never worry about getting it again.”

Now retired, Clara makes a point of staying active. She is involved in several organizations for seniors, sees her family regularly, and she is enthusiastic about the programs at her church. “I’m busy. It’s good to keep busy. A lot of people that are in the senior organizations have had cancer. It touches almost everybody.”

Project Self-Sufficiency, in conjunction with the Susan G. Komen for the Cure® North Jersey, Intercar Mercedes Benz, Sussex Honda, the New Jersey Herald, and the Sussex County Cancer Coalition have sponsored a campaign, “Mammograms Save Lives,” to underscore the importance of annual mammograms to the residents of Sussex County. The effort includes flyers, billboards and newspaper ads, along with a public relations campaign. Clara is a strong advocate for the value of an annual mammogram. “I highly recommend mammograms,” notes Clara who still visits her physician regularly for exams.

Free mammograms are offered regularly at Project Self-Sufficiency to uninsured and underinsured women over the age of 40 who reside in Sussex County, 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.

“You find out that life is precious. You never thought it would happen to you, and then you realize that it can happen. I don’t dwell on it. I feel good and I live a normal life. I was lucky.”

Project Self-Sufficiency will be offering free mammograms at the agency in March, 2012. Interested women are encouraged to call the agency at 973-940-3500 to make an appointment. Free mammograms are also available through the New Jersey Cancer Education and Early Detection (NJ CEED’s) program at St. Clare’s Hospital in Sussex. Interested participants are encouraged to call the hospital at 973-702-2740. In addition, Newton Memorial Hospital will provide a free mammogram for women who qualify through the Newton Memorial Hospital Foundation’s “Mammograms Save Lives” program. Those without health insurance are encouraged to contact Newton Memorial Hospital’s Education/Outreach office at 973-579-8340 for more information.

