

## Intuition Saves Local Woman's Life



When a routine mammogram detected a lump in one of Diane Little's breasts, Diane assumed that her surgeon would immediately remove it. However, her physician declined to operate once the results of a biopsy on the tissue indicated that the lump was harmless. Feeling uncomfortable about carrying the mass around in her body, Diane insisted on having it removed. A week

after the surgery she received a shocking phone call from her doctor who told her that the lump had in fact been cancerous all along. Diane quickly switched to a different medical practice. She found an oncologist and began a year-long odyssey through chemotherapy and radiation treatments. "My woman's intuition saved my life," she says.

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.

Diane's experience at the age of 48 mirrored a similar situation she had encountered when she was just 22 years old. Then, she had found a lump herself and had learned that it was benign after having it removed. "From then on I was having regular mammograms," noted Diane. "I am the biggest advocate of mammograms, not just in October but all year long." She had assumed that the recurrence of a lump 20 years later would follow the same pattern of detection and removal. Instead she endured lengthy chemotherapy

infusions every three weeks over a 4-month time period. The medication was extremely aggressive and her new physician warned her that she would lose her hair, to which Diane gamely replied, "Lose my hair or lose my life? Which would you rather do? Hello!"

Following the chemotherapy regimen Diane received 35 consecutive radiation treatments. Despite the rigorous regimen, Diane retained a positive outlook. "I have a wonderful, loving husband, strong faith and lots of friends. I am very grateful to all of them. You need to surround yourself with people who are going to put you in a positive frame of mind."

During Diane's 5-hour-long chemotherapy infusions, she had a lot of time to reflect. "I never said, 'why me?'" Having cancer puts your life into a tailspin but there are wonderful, loving people out there." She vowed to volunteer in a meaningful way if she survived. Once Diane received a clean bill of health from her oncologist, she marched down to Newton Medical Center and volunteered to deliver books and magazines to patients once a week. "I'm healthy again and I can give back. I have gotten to see graduations, weddings and grandbabies. I am so grateful to still be around."

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.

Project Self-Sufficiency will be offering free mammograms at the agency on Thursday, January 31st, from 10:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m. Interested women 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 at Saint Clare's Hospital in Sussex. 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 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.

