

## Local Breast Cancer Survivor Celebrates Seven Years



Seven years have passed since Eileen Bostonian discovered the lump in her breast that would change the course of her life. As chronicled in the *New Jersey Herald* in 2011, Bostonian underwent grueling chemotherapy and radiation treatments in order to survive. Now several years later, she claims to have moved on with her life. “I have put it behind me,” she explains on the eve of her annual mammogram. “Time flies,

and that is good in a way.”

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.

Bostonian decided to mark her fifth year of survival in a special way. She purchased flowers and a cake for herself and had a celebratory dinner with a friend. “I dropped all kinds of hints to my husband, but sometimes they just don’t get it,” she laughs. “This is a reason for me to celebrate, so I thought, ‘why not?’” Since her recovery, Bostonian has made dramatic changes in her home life and work life. She has a new job with a much shorter commute, and last summer, she and her husband, John, invited his elderly parents to share their home. With her husband retired, he is able to assist his parents with their needs during the day. The foursome have dinner together nightly. The change has been positive for everyone, although Bostonian admits that she is looking forward to a spring vacation with just her husband. “Life is too short. Do as much as you can,” she muses. Caretaking comes naturally to Bostonian who has no children, but who continues to watch over her younger siblings and her extended family. When her younger sister encountered some hard times, Eileen gave her a car and a pair of hearing aids. However, she is frustrated by her sister’s failure to ever get a mammogram, despite her own experience with breast cancer. “She does look up to me. You would think that she would get a mammogram!”

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%.

Free mammograms will be offered at Project Self-Sufficiency on Thursday, March 31<sup>st</sup>, from 10:00 a.m. – 2:30 p.m., with funding obtained from the recent High Point Regional High School Play Pink event. 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.

With the exception of some slight bone loss, Bostonian has had few long-term effects from her breast cancer diagnosis or the chemotherapy and radiation treatments. “I am glad that I did not have extensive surgery.” She continues to exercise regularly, monitor her diet and see her physician annually. She participates in walks to raise funds for breast cancer research, and she has volunteered at a local camp for children who have been diagnosed with cancer. For those who are currently battling cancer, Bostonian advises, “Find somebody who has been through it and talk with them. Everybody’s situation is a little bit different.”

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.

