

Family Support helps Local Woman Battle Breast Cancer



Florence Craudell will mark her 10th anniversary of being cancer-free this year, a milestone which she does not take for granted. She credits her daughters and her friends for helping her recover from breast cancer, which she found through a self-exam after a mammogram found a questionable mass less than a year before.

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.

Florence wasted no time after she discovered a lump in her breast. Within two days, she had arranged for a follow-up mammogram and a visit with a surgeon. "I wasn't kidding around," she noted. When she received a call from the surgeon that the mass was cancerous, she was not surprised. "Instinctively, I knew. When you find something that large, you just know it is cancer. It still felt like a kick in the stomach, but it was not a surprise."

Florence had been employed in the customer service department at a local business at the time of her diagnosis. The company's chief executive gave her permission to take time off from work for her treatment; Florence was gone for nine months. During that time, she underwent surgery, endured chemotherapy treatments every three weeks, and received a follow-up form of chemotherapy. The treatments exhausted her and caused her to lose all of her hair. Losing her hair was a challenge for Florence. "You know it's going to

happen, but it is degrading. It hurts." She purchased a wig, but refused to wear it, because it itched. Instead, friends brought her a large collection of hats and scarves which she wore to keep out the winter chill.

She moved in with one of her adult daughters during her recovery. "Everything seemed to go in slow motion; at least it did for me during that time. I would get dressed and then just sit in a chair." A friend stopped by every day and took Florence out for a walk. Her other daughter swooped in on the weekends and spirited away all of the medical bills, some of which were in the thousands of dollars.

"Cancer changed everyone that I know," recalled Florence recently. Her daughters, nieces and friends are scrupulous about receiving annual mammograms as a result of witnessing Florence's experiences with surgery, treatment and recovery. "We all became closer." She downplays comments from her family about her bravery. "It wasn't bravado, it was fear! You take it one day at a time. I did what I was told to do." Florence still credits that initial mammogram for putting her on high alert and giving her the incentive to perform self-exams each month. "That mammogram put us on our toes."

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 offer free mammograms on Tuesday, June 18th, 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.

