

Young Mother of Twins Beats Breast Cancer



Although she is a self-proclaimed “mammogram nut case,” breast cancer survivor Francine Vince has never had a mammogram. Francine was only 36 years old when she was diagnosed with Stage Three breast cancer. At the time, Francine was more than seven months pregnant with twins, making a mammogram a clinical impossibility.

The breast cancer was so advanced that Francine and her medical team elected to begin chemotherapy before her twins were even born. “The twins were born healthy,” noted Francine ruefully, “They both had full heads of hair and I was bald.”

Breast cancer does not run in Francine’s family, so the possibility of contracting the disease never crossed her mind. “I know my family history. Heart disease, high cholesterol and twins run in my family,” noted Francine, “But breast cancer never even occurred to me. My father has eight sisters, and nobody in my family has had breast cancer. At the time I was diagnosed, I was too young to have had my first mammogram!”

One out of eight women will develop breast cancer, yet the majority of them 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 the birth of her twins, Francine had seven more rounds of chemotherapy, surgery and radiation treatments. Francine returned to work following her chemotherapy, and she continued to work while she underwent radiation treatments. As the Director of Mental Health & Addiction Services in Passaic County, Francine commutes two hours each day and she learned very quickly that she had to make some changes in her life. “As a social worker, I had always had a very detached way that I worked with people. I never really understood how difficult it was to ask for help. I thought

I was supermom. I had it all under control. I was pregnant with twins, I already had a child, and I never stopped working through all of this.” Francine had to learn to rely on friends and family to help her run her household, care for her children and provide meals. “I learned what it is like to accept help. I really changed my perception of myself.”

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.

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.

“I absolutely recommend getting a mammogram. They are a fantastic diagnostic tool,” comments Francine. “I am always telling people to get one.” Francine recently celebrated her sixth year of being cancer free. Her children are thriving and her life is good. “I am very optimistic about my future,” says Francine.

Project Self-Sufficiency will be offering free mammograms at the agency on Thursday, October 6th. 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.

