

Local Mother of Two Beats Cancer for the Second Time



Jane Wells does not consider herself to be heroic or inspirational in any way, despite the accolades she continues to receive from those around her. The widowed mother of two teenage children is quietly determined to make something positive out of her recent bout with breast cancer, a disease which was caused by treatments she received from battling Hodgkin's disease during her adolescence. Jane has no family history of breast cancer, and she was about to schedule her annual mammogram when she found a lump in her breast in late 2010.

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. Like Jane, 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.

Jane's road to recovery has been rocky. The cancer in her breast was initially diagnosed as Stage 1, but was upgraded to Stage 3A following a series of three surgical procedures in late 2010 and early 2011. Jane stoically began 16 weeks of chemotherapy treatments. With assistance from her mother, Jane was able to continue to care for her two children. Halfway through the course of treatment, Jane was hospitalized with congestive heart failure, a side effect of the potent chemotherapy drugs she had been administered. She rallied, and finished her chemotherapy treatments with a different drug. She lost her hair, and experienced overwhelming fatigue and body

aches which left her unable to do much but lie on the couch. "The entire month of May is a blur," she notes wryly.

Having cancer for the second time has mobilized Jane. "The first time I was young, and it didn't change the way I lived my life. The second time, having kids, and being a widow, I am grateful that I am still able to be here to take care of them. Now I am living my life, getting back in shape, trying to be healthy and trying to make something positive out of all of this."

Jane is a fierce proponent of the value of mammograms. "It's a little uncomfortable, but it's not a painful process. If I didn't get a mammogram, I wouldn't be here. It's really important that women get it done." Project Self-Sufficiency, in conjunction with the Susan G. Komen for the Cure® North Jersey Affiliate, 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.

Project Self-Sufficiency will be offering free mammograms at the agency on Thursday, May 31st, from 10:00 a.m. - 5:30 p.m. 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.

