

## Local Woman Determined to Fight Breast Cancer with Humor



The first thing you notice about Hamburg resident Lisa Permian is her infectious sense of humor. She is direct without being confrontational, and despite having had multiple surgeries during the last few years, she is not bitter. Lisa found a lump in her breast at the age of 32. The lump turned out

to be benign, but five years later, she found another one. "I knew it wasn't the same," she predicted accurately. Lisa was diagnosed with Stage 2B breast cancer at the age of 37. "I looked my doctor right in the eye and asked him if I was going to die, and he said 'no', and that was it. I never felt sorry for myself."

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 Lisa, 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.

Lisa endured 4 months of chemotherapy followed by 7 weeks of radiation treatments. During this time she continued to work as a production supervisor at Newton Screen Printing, scheduling her chemotherapy sessions for late in the week so that she could return to work on Mondays. "Chemo wasn't fun, but it wasn't as bad as I expected it to be," she noted. Lisa quickly gained a reputation at the Sparta Cancer Center for her wacky sense of humor. She carted duffel bags filled with stuffed animals to every chemotherapy session and even sported a temporary "got milk?" tattoo on one memorable day. She hosted a party at her last chemotherapy session, decorating her bald head with pink ribbons and a Sponge Bob party hat. "I wasn't a normal patient," she noted wryly.

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.

Five years after her initial diagnosis of breast cancer, a mammogram found pre-cancerous cells in Lisa's other breast. Because it was found early, the cancer was able to be treated surgically without additional chemotherapy or radiation treatments. Lisa receives yearly mammograms and MRI scans, and gets follow up blood work done annually. She is currently cancer free. "Mammograms and self-exams can save your life," she says emphatically. "They saved mine."

Lisa lends her support to a variety of organizations in her personal crusade to eradicate cancer. She was asked to speak at the recent American Cancer Society function about her experiences as a breast cancer survivor. She participates in the annual Romp to Stomp Snowshoe event at Mountain Creek, and she will be shaving her head this month to raise funds for the St. Baldrick's Foundation which assists children with cancer. "Losing my hair was no big deal; I didn't lose my life. Now I shave my head for the kids. The attitude is it. You've got to have a good attitude. I'm alive and I'm not going to sit back and not live it. I'm going to live it."

Project Self-Sufficiency will be offering free mammograms at the agency on Thursday, March 29th, 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.

