

## Breast Cancer Survivor Vows to “Fight Like a Girl” for Her Health



Margaret Hoey is a mother, a grandmother, a wife and a breast cancer survivor, who has vowed to “fight like a girl” to make sure that she continues to prevail over the virulent form of cancer she contracted two years ago. A working mother of two adult children, Margaret had always been vigilant about receiving annual physical exams and mammograms. Several lumpectomies and biopsies for benign fibroids were scattered throughout her medical history, so Margaret was not particularly concerned when she found a lump in her breast during a self-examination. A follow-up mammogram showed nothing of concern, while an ultrasound found a benign cyst.

A mere two weeks later, Margaret noticed that the appearance of her breast had changed dramatically, and requested that her surgeon take a second look. Her doctor was appalled at the difference, a biopsy was performed of the tissue surrounding the benign cyst, and three days later Margaret was diagnosed with Stage Three Invasive Lobular Carcinoma. Her persistence saved her life.

“Unfortunately not all cancer is detected on mammograms,” comments surgeon and breast cancer specialist Dr. Michelle O’Shea. “Lobular cancers tend not to grow as a ball of cells, which would be seen as a new dense mass in mammogram. Instead they grow as sheets of cells, similar to adding cards to a deck, so the mammogram change is small until the mass is much larger. This is why mammogram is only one tool for detecting breast cancer. Breast self exam looking for any change from normal, that doesn't go away, or worsens is also very important.”

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.

Margaret endured surgery, six rounds of chemotherapy and 36 radiation treatments. She lost her hair but not her positive attitude. “I’m a happy person and I don’t dwell on the disease at all. It is an aggressive form of breast cancer and I am at high risk of recurrence, but I feel like I am going to beat it.”

Following her recovery, Margaret retired from her job as a pharmacy technician and has used her free time to organize her house, cleaning out closets and cupboards, attacking the basement, and cataloguing the photos she has taken over the years of her children and grandchildren. “I have always sung all the time around the house and I still do. My husband calls me the Entertainer of the Year. I also have another favorite saying and that is: ‘Deal with it!’ People are dealt many unfavorable situations in their lives, and you just have to do what you have to do and get on with your life.”

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. “I recommend mammograms and self-exams and if there is anything that you find is not normal, get it taken care of,” advises Margaret. “It could save your life.”

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, 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.

