

Local Woman Declares that Mammograms Save her Life Twice



Rose Marie Mistler was diagnosed with breast cancer after a routine mammogram more than 23 years ago at the age of 57. Now 80, Rose Marie has had her share of health scares including a second breast cancer diagnosis, a broken ankle, and most recently, a complete hysterectomy. Although

breast cancer does not run in her family, Rose Marie's family has been plagued with Lynch Syndrome, an inherited disorder that increases the risk of many types of cancer. Consequently, Rose Marie is extremely vigilant about her health. "I am a strong believer in mammograms. I feel they saved my own life twice!" Still spry, Rose Marie proudly declares, "I shovel my own snow, mow my own lawn and plant my own garden." She is retired from her profession as an accountant at several local businesses, but still tutors children almost every day. She even set out on a cross-country drive by herself to visit relatives in the mid-west during the fall.

Breast cancer strikes more than 211,000 women each year, and in 2009, 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. According to data compiled recently by the Komen for the Cure® North Jersey Affiliate, almost 33% of women over the age of 40 who reside in Sussex County have not had a mammogram in the past year, a percentage which is marginally better than some of the other counties in the agency's 9-county service area in northern New Jersey. However, 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. The average 5-year mortality rate across all ethnic groups in Sussex County is 33.4%, almost 7 percentage points higher than the 9-county average of 26.5%.

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.

If a breast cancer patient can be described as fortunate, Rose Marie fits the bill. She was so vigilant about obtaining regular mammograms, that her breast cancer was detected early enough for her to avoid chemotherapy and radiation treatments. "I swear by mammograms! I received no chemotherapy or radiation because I had a mammogram and my cancer was detected very early each time. I would tell everyone to get one." With each breast cancer diagnosis, Rose Marie opted for a mastectomy. "I figured it ain't paying no rent, so get it out of here!" she chortles. All joking aside, Rose Marie notes that she has been changed profoundly by the experience of having cancer. "I changed my eating habits and my exercise habits drastically, and I certainly appreciate life."

Free mammograms will be offered to underinsured and uninsured women over the age of 40 on Thursday, January 30th, from 10:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m. at Project Self-Sufficiency, 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.

Women who are interested in receiving a free mammogram 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 administered by the Sussex County Health Department. 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 973-579-0750, ext. 1246. In addition, Newton Medical Center will provide a free mammogram for women who qualify through the Newton Medical Center Foundation's "Mammograms Save Lives" program. Those without health insurance are encouraged to contact Newton Medical Center's Education/Outreach office at 973-579-8340 for more information.

