

Breast Cancer Diagnosis at Age 85 Fails to Slow Down Sussex County Resident



Ruth Voreck still likes to windsurf on Lake Mohawk occasionally during the summer, which isn't surprising until you realize that she recently celebrated her 90th birthday. An avid athlete, Ruth currently enjoys golf, but she has been known to play a mean game of

tennis, as well as ice skate and swim with great precision. Years ago, when she was employed at the University of Chicago, she met her future husband on a hiking trip. When she found a lump in one of her breasts at the age of 85, she marched into the doctor's office and had it taken care of immediately. Her proactive attitude probably saved her life. Her doctor performed an ultrasound followed by a lumpectomy, and Ruth received a diagnosis of Stage One breast cancer. She received 5 weeks of radiation and proceeded to get on with her life. "I was lucky," remarked Ruth.

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.

Ruth had no family history of breast cancer and

had never worried about it herself. When she had to tell her husband of 61 years, her three children, and five grandchildren, she notes, "I played it down so they didn't get very excited about it either." Although Ruth's breast cancer was detected by a self-exam, Ruth still recommends mammograms as a diagnostic tool, and continues to receive a mammogram annually. "Worrying about it is worse than doing it. The question marks are worse than the mammogram."

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, 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.

