

## Routine Mammogram Saves the Life of Area Resident



As a Supervisor of Communications at the Sussex County Sheriff's Department for more than 16 years, Sherri Foley has been exposed to domestic disputes, violence, foreclosures, people resisting arrest and other malevolent situations. Through it all she has tried to keep a positive outlook,

frequently telling herself that things could be worse. In November of 2004, after a routine mammogram, she got a glimpse of how much worse things could get. Sherri was diagnosed with breast cancer. "I was shocked," says Sherri, noting ruefully that she had almost cancelled the appointment but the recent news about an aunt with breast cancer had spurred her to do the right thing and follow through with her appointment.

One out of eight women will develop breast cancer, yet the majority of them 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. Early diagnosis is the key to a cure, and urging women to get a mammogram can be the difference between life and death.

Even though Sherri had just learned that she had breast cancer, she considered herself fortunate. Her decision to get her annual mammogram had allowed the cancer to be detected at a very early stage, meaning that Sherri did not require treatment with chemotherapy. Her treatment regimen included surgery and 7 weeks of daily radiation. No chemotherapy also meant relatively little fatigue, no hair loss or nausea, and very little time off from work. In fact, Sherri felt so good following her initial surgery, that she overexerted herself doing routine housework and landed right back in the hospital. Since then, Sherri has taken things more slowly.

The single mother of three adult sons, Sherri has always prided herself on her independence. After her diagnosis, she elected to keep the news a secret from her family. "That was a mistake," noted Sherri regretfully. Several months after her first hospitalization, she broke the news to her family. "They were surprised and they were very angry at me for not saying anything beforehand." Since then, her three sons, co-workers and

friends have been very supportive, helping with household chores and accommodating Sherri's need for flexibility at work. "You really need positive people around when you have bad things happen. It is scary."

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 year, hundreds of women have received mammograms through the program at Project Self-Sufficiency.

Sherri strongly recommends mammograms. "I am avid about mammograms," she notes with a laugh. "I truly know it saved me. It's not comfortable to do but it's a lot more comfortable than what the outcome could be if you don't get one. You should get one for yourself, but if you don't get one for you, do it for your family, your friends and the people who love you."

Cancer free for six years, Sherri has begun to volunteer for the Red Cross, and take vacations to places like Spain, Italy and Israel. "One of my favorite sayings is 'live for today, because tomorrow may never come,'" remarks Sherri. "I love my family, I love my grandkids, and I embrace life because you never know when it's going to be taken away. I am a firm believer in telling people that I love them."

Project Self-Sufficiency, in conjunction with the Susan G. Komen for the Cure North Jersey®, 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 frequently to uninsured and underinsured women over the age of 40 at Project Self-Sufficiency. The next available date for a free mammogram is Thursday, March 3rd, 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. 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.

