



THINK *pink*

October 2023

Special Supplement to
THE EXPOSITOR

YMCA Go Pink. Standing L-R: Helen Regas, 16-year survivor; Sandra Burton, 30-year survivor; Gail Webb, 16-year survivor; Brenda Scoggins, 15-year survivor; seated, L-R: Terri Jackman, four-year survivor; Wenda Leftwich, 17-year survivor; and Barbara Lambert, 20-year survivor.



INSIDE THIS EDITION

- 3 **GO PINK** - a free outreach program at Sparta-White County YMCA
- 4 **Misty Shirley** shares her survivor story
- 5 **Pam Hart** discusses the 'cat scan' that saved her life
- 6-7 **Diana Tel Toro** shares how she braved multiple diagnoses
- 8-9 **Jamie Sawyer** navigates cancer journey through faith, family, and friends
- 10 **What to know about breast cancer**
- 11 **What to know about breast lumps**
- 11 **Breast cancer FAQ**

DID YOU KNOW? Breast cancer affects millions of women each year, but breast cancer also can be diagnosed in men. Each year in the United States, about 2,400 cases of breast cancer are diagnosed in men, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Roughly 270 men will be diagnosed with breast cancer this year in Canada, according to the Canadian Cancer Society. Macmillan Cancer Support says men have a small amount of breast tissue behind their nipples, where breast cancer potentially can develop. Breast tissue in boys and girls is the same until puberty, when girls start to develop more. Signs of male breast cancer include a lump or swelling in the breast, redness or flaky skin in the breast, irritation or dimpling of the skin around the nipple, nipple discharge, or pulling in or pain of the nipple, states the CDC.

October is **BREAST CANCER** AWARENESS month

Sisters who have fought and won the battle

YMCA GO PINK outreach program free to anyone who has been diagnosed with breast cancer

RACHEL AUBERGER

Staff Writer

When a person gets bad news, they usually go through a series of emotions - sadness, anger, fear, resignation, determination. Knowing you aren't alone, that there are people just like you, that there are people who have gone before and have ridden that same emotional roller coaster, finding someone that can help you sort through the new information you have received, someone who can let you know what to expect next, someone who can direct you to other resources - finding all of that can make a bad day better.

That's the aim of the YMCA GO PINK program.

GO PINK is a free outreach program that provides comprehensive nutrition, exercise, and wellness recovery services for anyone who has ever been diagnosed with breast cancer - whether they are currently undergoing treatment or are a long-term survivor.

"We are here for you, regardless of where you are in your journey," Terri Jackman, a four-year survivor and current leader of the Sparta GO PINK chapter. "Our goal is to support someone going through treatment and post-treatment."

While GO PINK offers a free six-month YMCA membership, personal training with a cancer exercise specialist, nutrition counseling with a health coach, assessment and education with a lymphedema specialist, and monthly educational seminars. One of the biggest benefits of belonging to the group is the encouragement and support a person receives from fellow breast cancer patients and survivors.

"Dealing with breast cancer, getting that diagnosis, it leaves voids in your life, and it fills you with so many questions about what's next - even after you are cancer free," Terri Jackman explained. "Everyone's journey is different, but having someone who can provide some encouragement, someone you can voice those questions to, that's what GO PINK is all about. It's a place where people understand what you are going through - not just physically but emotionally."

For the women who meet at the Sparta YMCA every Tuesday morning, the GO PINK group has become a family - a group of sisters that share triumphs and worries, that celebrate milestones and pray together.

"I cried the whole time," Brenda Scoggins, who has survived breast cancer twice - once in 2008 and again in 2019 - said about



AWARENESS. In celebration of Breast Cancer Awareness Month, the Sparta GO PINK Chapter created an informational table at the YMCA.

joining GO PINK. "But these ladies, they lifted me up. They have seen me through some hardships and struggles. I look forward to seeing them every week."

Jackman agreed, saying that she was nervous the first time she met the GO PINK group, but that everyone was so welcoming and accepting.

The women in the Sparta GO PINK chapter all have different stories about how they fought cancer and survived, about how long they have been battling and how long they have been surviving, about what kind of cancer they had and how it was found. But what they all have that is the same is a love for each other and a desire to reach anyone who is going through what they did and welcome them into their sisterhood.

"If a person needs someone but isn't comfortable being in a group, even one as small as ours, that's OK," Wenda Leftwich, who also has survived cancer twice (2006 and 2013), said. "They can call one of us. We will talk to them as long and as often as they want or need. Anything they tell us will be kept confidential. We just want them to know we are here for them. We understand. And we have resources we can direct them to."



GO PINK. Standing L-R: Helen Regas, 16-year survivor; Sandra Burton, 30-year survivor; Gail Webb, 16-year survivor; Brenda Scoggins, 15-year survivor; seated, L-R: Terri Jackman, four-year survivor; Wenda Leftwich, 17-year survivor; and Barbara Lambert, 20-year survivor

They also strive to educate everyone - whether they are dealing with breast cancer, already won their fight, or just need information to store away in case it is needed in the future:

- Screening is important
- Be persistent in your communication with doctors
- Perform self-checks
- Early detection is key

You have a voice - tell your doctor what you are comfortable with; don't accept a "wait and watch" approach

Treatment is always changing and progressing

Anyone wishing to join the YMCA GO PINK is invited to simply show up at the Sparta YMCA any Tuesday. The group meets 10:30 a.m.-noon, and no YMCA membership is required.

Keeping faith with help from friends and family

RACHEL AUBERGER

Staff Writer

Oct. 15, 2020 - that is a date that Misty Shirley will never forget. While the rest of the world was trying to navigate new health guidelines surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic, Shirley was sitting stunned, shocked, and full of fear as she learned that she would be battling a different disease: breast cancer.

"It came in stages," Shirley said of both the information she received and the emotions that consumed her. "During my routine mammogram and ultrasound, they found what no self-examination I could do would have ever found."

But the global climate surrounding the pandemic didn't make finding, or treating, Shirley quite that simple. Her routine exams were originally scheduled for March, but, because of COVID, they were moved to May and then pushed further into August.

"I left there that day terrified, and I was like that deep down until I received a call five days later," Shirley said, explaining that during her exams, a spot was found on her right breast and a biopsy was done the very same day.

Shirley said the biopsy results showed pre-cancerous cells, and the surgeon wanted to remove the entire spot. Surgery was scheduled, and of course, as has become part of a new routine at medical facilities, a COVID test was also scheduled.

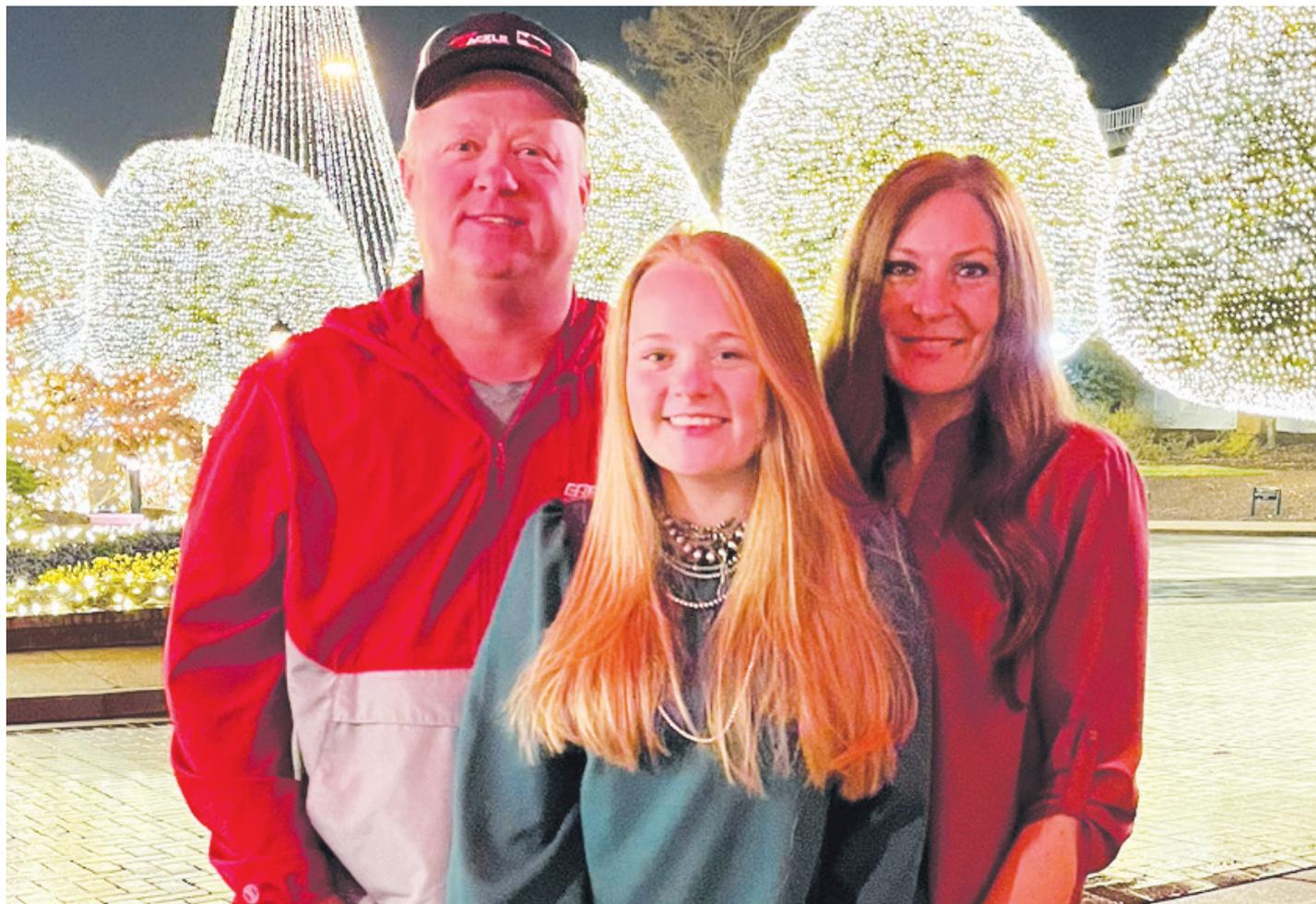
"My antigen test came back positive, so that delayed the surgery for two more weeks while I had to quarantine," she explained. "The spot was finally removed the first of October."

Shirley said that her follow-up appointment was not at all what she was expecting. Instead, she sat shocked and scared as she was told that she had Ductal Carcinoma In Situ (DCIS) Stage 1. The recommended approach for beating DCIS: a double mastectomy.

"Yes, I cried that first day a little here and there, but I knew I had to be strong for my family," Shirley said about receiving the news. "I was very lucky - it was in the early stages and still contained in the milk duct.

Shirley remembered telling individual members of her family and feeling their immediate support as they showered her with all of the love and positivity they could muster.

"I went to my appointment alone by choice," she said. "My first phone call



SURVIVOR. Misty Shirley with her husband, Buryl, and her daughter, Mary Carter

was to my husband. I cried after I told him, but he was so strong on that phone call for me. He was very positive, telling me that 'they beat this every day and as strong as you are, you will too.'"

Shirley said that she called her mother next, and that it was a very emotional conversation.

"Her soft heart cried enough for everyone in our family," Shirley said about her mom's reaction to the news. "Everyone was just so strong."

While Shirley considers herself lucky because doctors were able to remove all of the cancer through the double mastectomy and lymph nodes, so she did not need to undergo any radiation or chemotherapy treatments, she did have to have four surgeries in less than a year.

"Surgery itself was tough," she admitted. "I had two surgeries in 30 days, removing the spot and then the mastectomy. A little over three months later a third surgery for reconstruction took place, and then a fourth another seven months after that.

"Even though I did not have to go through any treatments, my life completely changed - and still has to this

day," she said.

Shirley explained that she went from being a person who was always busy to someone who had to scale back, rest, and learn to rely on others to help her.

"Being raised a farm girl, I was used to physical chores, but all of the lifting that comes with that had to come to a halt," she said "I was no longer able to tote that bag of feed, clean that pen, carry a water bucket - things I took for granted. I could not do that for months."

To complicate matters, just a few weeks after her mastectomy, Shirley's husband had to have back surgery, which meant that neither of them were able to do much around the farm.

"A lot fell on our daughter, Mary Carter," she said, explaining that the teenager didn't hesitate to do what needed to be done, but that others quickly stepped up to help, too. "We had wonderful friends, my family, my mother-in-law, they all really pitched in to help us with feed orders, feeding on the farm, and helping at shows so that Mary Carter could still continue to show her animals."

Despite not being able to do much

on the farm, Shirley said she had to stay busy and felt lucky to be able to work from home which helped her keep a positive mindset.

The lessons of learning to lean on family and friends, staying positive, and keeping faith as she increased her prayer life became more important for Shirley and were lessons she had to call on again less than a year later.

"So, I am breast cancer free but still being monitored with appointments every six months," she said. "I thought I was going to be a whole year without surgery, but I wasn't," she said. "I was diagnosed with endometrial cancer last fall, and that has been a total of four surgeries since last October. But I am now cancer free from that also!"

Shirley said that she hopes anyone who has to sit in that chair, shocked and scared, like she did, will know that they aren't alone, that there is hope - no matter what their journey involves.

"I may not have had to go through chemo and radiation, but I lost a part of me," she said. "Keep the faith! Lean on your family and friends. Keep your head up. You will get through this."

Hart reflects on 'cat scan' that saved her life

RACHEL AUBERGER

Staff Writer

Pam Hart is a 22-year cancer survivor thanks to a unique "Cat Scan" she received all those years ago.

"In early February of 2001, as I lay on the bed relaxing, our cat crawled up on my chest for cuddling. He pressed his paws on my chest, and I felt terrible pain on the left side," Hart said, referring to what she now refers to as her "Cat Scan" - the one that saved her life.

The finding, no matter how it came, was surprising because Hart, who was living in California then, had a routine mammogram just a few short months before and with negative result. She had gone about her days reassured of her diagnosis. At the time, Hart was the primary caregiver for mother-in-law who had senile dementia.

But thanks to Hart's cat, life as they knew it was about to change.

"My primary doctor referred me to a surgeon for an exam," she said about what happened next. "He palpated the sore area and told me we would schedule a biopsy. 'Suspicious' was the vague term he used to describe what he felt."

For Hart, that visit started a whirlwind of doctor visits, surgeries, treatments, and recovery plans. But all of the chaos of that year is what gave her 22 years and more.

"I underwent a biopsy of the left breast, and the results indicated a positive pathology for cancer," she said. "I was referred to an oncologist who took a proactive, determined approach to my treatment plan. He recommended a mastectomy of the breast, and I opted for removal of both."

During the bilateral mastectomy, the surgeon would have a plastic surgeon place breast implants immediately. Later, the tissue expanders could be filled, over



22-YEAR SURVIVOR. Pam Hart

time, to provide breast shape for Hart when she was ready. But, once again, there was more news for Hart.

"During the mastectomy, it was found that the lymph nodes under my armpit had invasive cancer, so several nodes were removed," Hart reminisced, adding that she had no history of breast cancer at all in her family prior to her diagnosis. "I received the pathology results from the removed tissue: Invasive Ductal Carcinoma, Her2+, stage 3."

So, for Hart, the mastectomy wasn't even close to the end. After recovering from surgery, she endured a barrage of eight chemotherapy treatments and seven weeks of radiation.

"I slept long hours. I lost all of my hair and was nauseous and weak for most of

the time," Hart said, adding that the family had to find temporary caregivers for her mother-in-law while she was fighting

for her life. "It was a very challenging and stressful time for our family."

"My faith in the Lord was strong, and I knew He was right there beside me every step of the way and gave me assurance," Hart said. "All during my treatments, though, I remained strong in my faith and positive in my outlook. I had a strong faith in the Lord, and He got me through it and gave me strength."

In fact, Hart says that would be her number one piece of advice for anyone at any stage of their own cancer journey.

"Rely on your friends and family for support, to trust in the Lord and He will give you strength," she advised, "and always try to stay positive so your body heals well."

Hart said that, aside from edema in her arms due to fluid build-up at the surgery site, she is now healthy and cancer-free. She gives all the credit to God, her doctors - Dr. Cross and Dr. Gianjani - and what she says was a wonderful chemo and radiation team.

"It has been 22 years since my 'Cat-scan' as I like to call it," she said, "and I am enjoying our retirement in Tennessee and looking forward to many more years, Lord willing!"



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Braving cancer and the death of a daughter

Diana Del Toro reflects on her diagnoses and offers encouragement to other fighters

RACHEL AUBERGER
Staff Writer

“Breast cancer saved my life.” That’s not a statement that you hear every day, but, for Diana Del Toro, it is the truth.

Del Toro was diagnosed with breast cancer, in February 2013. During a pre-op appointment for a planned lumpectomy, her surgeon found a lump on her neck - a lump that required an ultrasound. The ultrasound revealed thyroid cancer stage 3, which was later determined as stage 4, and had begun to spread.

For Del Toro, the entire ordeal - which included two surgeries and months of radiation - was an emotional ride. The initial finding came just a year-and-a-half after she had lost her daughter, Angelie, to alveolar rhabdomyosarcoma, which is a childhood cancer.

“When I got the news, my first thought was for my family. I knew what their reaction was going to be after having just went through losing Angelie,” she said. “That’s all I could think about.”



SURVIVOR. Diana Del Toro

Del Toro said she watched her children try to be strong as she gathered the family together to share the news. She kept offering them comfort telling them she would be OK, that cancer is not an automatic death sentence, but it was her husband’s reaction that was heartbreaking.

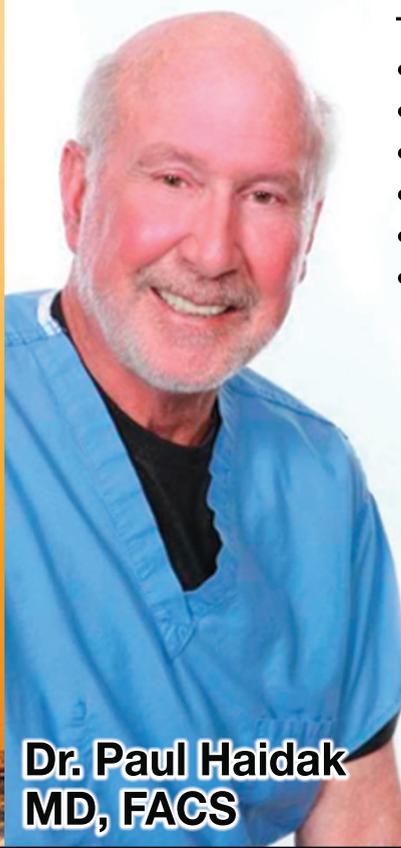
“My dear Frank, the expression on his face. It was something I hadn’t seen since the day Angelie was diagnosed,” Diana said as she remembered both days with vivid detail.

Diana approached the next months with a plan, one thing at a time, taking care of business and getting healthy. She knew that she was fighting adenocarcinoma, which starts in cells in the ducts (the milk ducts) or the lobules (glands in the breast that make milk). It was contained in a tunnel against her breast wall. Step one was the lumpectomy. After that, she began brachytherapy radiation, something that, despite the brutal side

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FAMILY. Breast cancer survivor Diana Del Toro with her family (Photo by Isaac Trotter Photography)

DIANA DEL TORO SHARES HER SURVIVOR STORY

CONTINUED FROM 6A

effects, she was thankful for.

"You have to meet certain criteria for this radiation where they surgically input what looks like a balloon into your breast, fill it with saline, and then insert a path wand (radiation) into your breast," she explained. "I prayed that I would be a candidate and, thank God, I qualified. If not, I would have had to have chemo."

Del Toro went to Knoxville where for five straight days, both in the morning and in the afternoon, she received the radiation treatment. In an effort to spare her family from seeing her struggle, she went alone.

"I told my family that no one can be there. I lied. But I just needed to do this on my own," she explained, "and I'm glad I did. It was rough. It was exhausting. I hardly ate. But I got it done."

Moving down her check list of things that needed to be taken care of, once she completed the brachytherapy radiation, Diana began taking care of the thyroid cancer that her surgeon had found just days before her lumpectomy.

"I was told that my breast cancer saved my life," Diana said. "In another six months, it would have spread all over my body, and there would have been nothing they could do."

That would not have been a conversation she would have been able to have with her family - to not be able to offer them comfort and hope, to tell them they were going to relive the same pain they had just experienced.

And for Diana, family is everything.

She found strength in the memory of how hard her daughter had fought her fight. She found love in the eyes of her husband and children as they cared for her through her surgeries, treatments, and yet another diagnosis three years later - this time with a different form of cancer in the same breast - and the decision to have a full mastectomy done. She found inspiration in the memory of her mother, who had passed away years earlier.

"My Mother, who passed away many years before my diagnosis, had gone through so much in her own lifetime, but she never let anything knock her down," Diana said. "Her faith in God and her spirit side - those got me through my own fight."

She said that being strong didn't mean there weren't times when she had to take moments to just let her emotions flow for herself.

"Oh, I cried a lot, especially when I had to make the decision to have a mastectomy after a different cancer was found in the same breast," Diana said. "Just knowing I had to do it all again. It was a lot."

Diana hopes that making the decision to share her story can offer encouragement to someone else. She wasn't always willing to share. She knew the people of Sparta would rally behind her just like they did when they rallied behind Angelie, but she also felt a little guilt knowing their support would be directed to her and her family again. And she didn't want to worry anyone.

"This amazing village of Sparta. I have never seen anything like this town. I have

met so many amazing people through all of this," she said. "I am forever grateful."

Now it is her turn to offer support for someone else, so she offers this advice:

"Say a lot of prayers. Everyone handles things differently. For me, it was

always being positive, pushing through. Do not take ANYTHING for granted - I learned that from Angelie she was a fighter, and I had to fight and just push. And, remember, cancer doesn't always mean death."

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Sawyer navigates cancer through faith, family, and friends

RACHEL AUBERGER

Staff Writer

For Jamie Sawyer, the words “breast cancer” were heartbreaking. Thinking about a future for her two young sons that might not include their mother. Lifetimes full of firsts – girlfriends, proms, ballgames, graduations, college, weddings – that she wouldn’t get to watch them experience. A future for her husband as he would try to figure out how to navigate life as a single parent. A future for her parents that didn’t include her.

“I immediately thought it was a death sentence,” Sawyer said about the way she received the news. “I got very minimal information besides ‘it’s very aggressive’ so I had no idea what to expect or how bad it actually was.”

Sawyer said her husband, Jerry, was with her when she received the news. Jamie then called her parents.

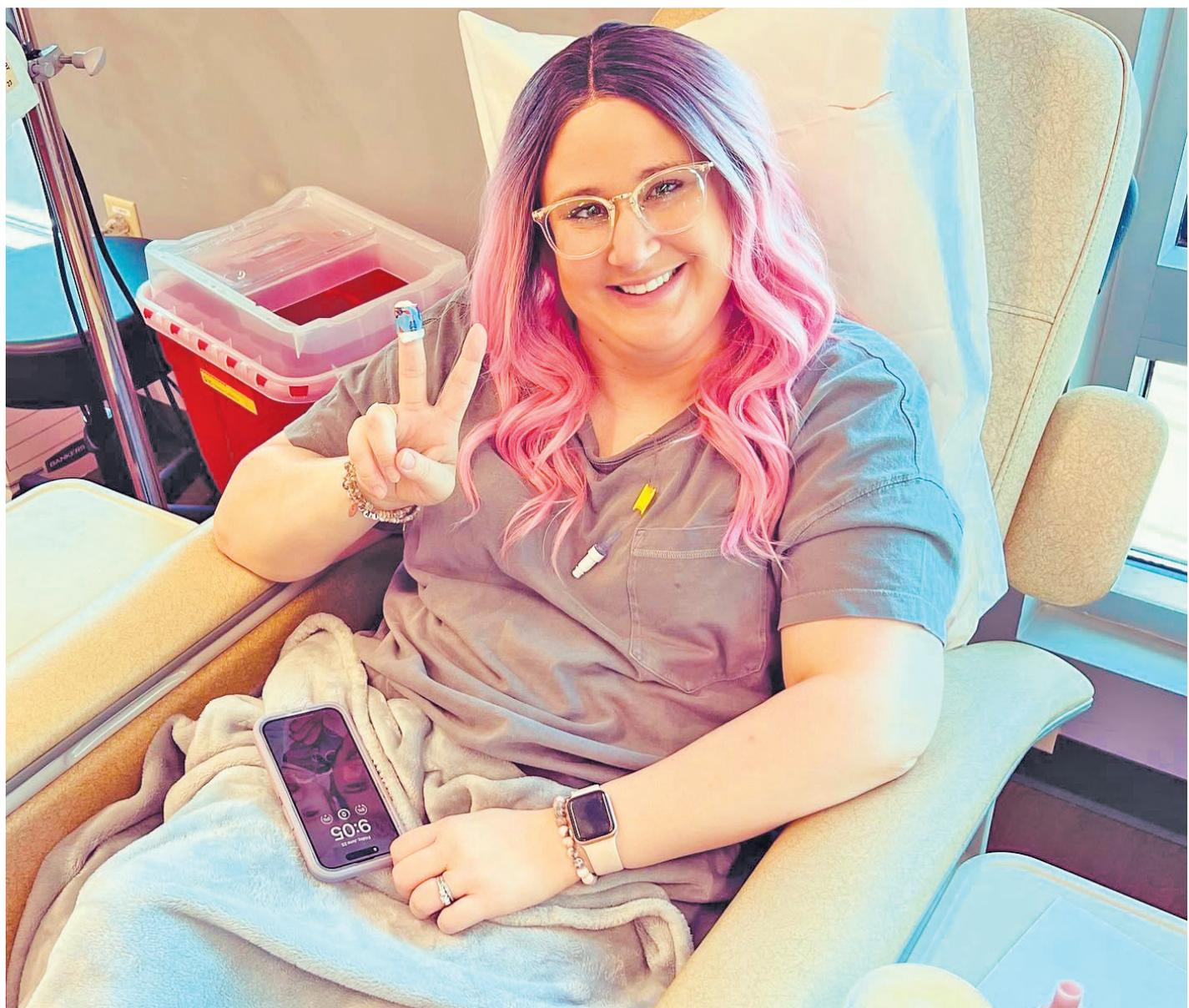
“That night, we all just sat together in my living room, not really knowing what to do or where to go from there,” she remembered, but said that the night turned into day, and she still felt frozen in those first moments. “I spent days at home just in constant fear of the future.”

But then things changed. Jamie met with a doctor at Tennessee Oncology, and they helped her develop a plan to attack the cancer. And, more importantly, she remembered her faith. She called on her friends, her brothers and sisters in faith, and her community. She didn’t keep quiet. She let them all know that she needed their love, support, and prayers like she had never needed them before. While her medical team helped her physically, her faith team lifted her spiritually.

Sawyer received six chemotherapy treatments over a span of 18 weeks, traveling to Murfreesboro every third week for four-hour treatments.

“My husband went with me to every chemo treatment and took care of me after. My parents live next door to me, and my dad is retired, so he took care of getting both of our boys to daycare and school. He also helped in the afternoons with picking them up,” she said. “Our oldest son, Maddox, is 9 years old and, thankfully, a few of my friends stepped up during my treatment time and took care of him. They would let him come over and spend the night, took him places, and kept him busy during the times I was down and sick from chemo. It was such a blessing to have them make sure he was taken care of through all of that.”

Sawyer said that allowing others to do the things she usually did for her family



TREATMENT. Breast cancer survivor Jamie Sawyer at a treatment appointment

was a big adjustment. As the person who takes her children to school, picks them up, makes sure that practices and games are on the schedule, goes grocery shopping, works a job, and helps with her son’s school’s PTO, she was always on the go. Until she couldn’t be anymore.

“During the last six months, I’ve definitely had to learn how to slow down and accept help from others,” she said about one of the biggest lessons she has learned this year.

But as big as that lesson was, the one that was even greater was that her faith was not misplaced, and that God does answer prayers and that there is power in numbers.

“My faith has 100 percent carried me through this journey,” Jamie said. “I have had a peace this whole time that just doesn’t make sense, and I know where it’s coming from. I know that so many in our community has been praying for me, and I am so thankful for that because I have

been able to feel the prayers. They have got me through it. We are so thankful to every single person who has prayed for me through all this.”

Jamie said she has received prayer cloths from different churches who had anointed the cloths and prayed over them as well as cards and letters from churches letting her know that she was on their prayer lists.

“I finished chemo mid-September,” Jamie said. “I had my final scans at the end of September, and it showed that the tumor had little to no blood flow going to it, meaning that treatment has worked, and the tumor is dead. Now I will be undergoing surgery, in October, and getting a double mastectomy done. This was a decision that I made because I am only 34 years old. I don’t want to have to go through this again, so I am going to do what I can to help make the chances of reoccurrence as slim as I can.”

For Sawyer, her story isn’t over, but she



SURVIVOR. Jamie Sawyer with sons Maddox (left) and Walker (right)

'FAITH HAS 100 PERCENT CARRIED ME THROUGH' - JAMIE SAWYER

CONTINUED FROM 8A

is no longer consumed with the fear that immobilized her at the beginning of this chapter.

"My faith has grown tremendously over the last five months," she said. "I've seen God work through this tragedy, and I know He will continue to. I'm not sure what my purpose is or what He wants me to do with this pain, but I know He is going to use me for something. Every day I read and pray Psalm 91. I read it multiple times a day. I read it at every doctor appointment in the waiting room."

Those who live in the shelter of the Most High will find rest in the shadow of the Almighty. This I declare about the Lord: He alone is my refuge, my place of safety; he is my God, and I trust him. For He will rescue you from every trap and protect you from deadly disease. He will cover you with his feathers. He will shelter you with his wings. His faithful promises are your armor and protection. Do not be afraid of the terrors of the night, nor the arrow that flies in the day. Do not dread the disease that stalks in darkness, nor the disaster that strikes at midday. - Psalms

"That's what helps me get through it

and has helped me over the last several months," she said.

Jamie hopes that being open with her story and sharing her journey as she has that she will not only have learned the value of prayer and faith and family and community but that she can share that knowledge with others and be a light in someone else's night.

"It's not an automatic death sentence. It's not ideal, and it's not the best news you'll ever receive, but there is always a purpose in your pain," Jamie said.

"If you make the Lord your refuge, if you make the Most High your shelter, no evil will conquer you; no plague will come near your home. For he will order his angels to protect you wherever you go. They will hold you up with their hands so you won't even hurt your foot on a stone. You will trample upon lions and cobras; you will crush fierce lions and serpents under your feet! - Psalms

"Just picture cancer as the lions and cobras," Jamie said. "You're going to come across them at times, but you're going to crush them! I've put my trust in Him since the very beginning of my diagnosis. I still praise Him every single day, and I will continue to."



FAMILY. Jamie Sawyer with husband, Jerry, and sons, Maddox and Walker.



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What to know about breast cancer recurrence

Millions of women across the globe are survivors of breast cancer. Those women serve as inspiration to millions more individuals, even as they bravely live with the threat of recurrence.

The Cleveland Clinic notes that most local recurrences of breast cancer occur within five years of a lumpectomy, which is a common breast cancer treatment during which cancer cells and a small margin of healthy breast tissue are removed. Even if recurrence is unlikely and/or beyond a woman's control, the lingering notion that breast cancer return at any moment can be difficult to confront. Learning about recurrence could calm the nerves of breast cancer survivors and their families.

DEFINING RECURRENCE

A second diagnosis of breast cancer does not necessarily mean women are experiencing a recurrence. The Cleveland Clinic notes that breast cancer that develops in the opposite breast that was not treated and does not appear anywhere else in the body is not the same thing as recurrence. Recurrence occurs when the cancer is detected in the same breast in which the disease was initially detected. Breastcancer.org notes that cancer found in the opposite breast is likely not a recurrence.

HOW RECURRENCE HAPPENS

Treatment for breast cancer is often very successful, particularly in patients whose cancer was discovered early. Recurrence can happen when single cancer cells or groups of cancer cells are left behind after surgery. Breastcancer.org notes that tests for cancer cannot detect if single cancer cells or small groups of cells are still present after surgery, and a single cell that survives post-surgery rounds of radiation therapy and chemotherapy can multiply and ultimately become a tumor.

TYPES OF BREAST CANCER RECURRENCE

There are different types of breast cancer recurrence, including:

- **Local recurrence:** The Cleveland Clinic notes that a local recurrence diagnosis indicates the cancer has returned to the same breast or chest area as the original tumor.
- **Regional recurrence:** A regional recurrence means the cancer has come back near the original tumor, in lymph nodes in the armpit or collarbone area.
- **Distant recurrence:** A distant recurrence indicates the breast cancer has spread away from the original tumor. The Cleveland Clinic notes this is often referred to as stage 4 breast cancer. This diagnosis indicates the tumor has spread

to the lungs, bones, brain, or other parts of the body.

THE RISK OF RECURRENCE

Johns Hopkins Medicine notes that certain variables unique to each individual affect the risk of breast cancer recurrence. This is an important distinction, as women who have survived breast cancer but are concerned about recurrence should know that they will not necessarily experience one, even if a first-degree relative or friend did. The type of cancer and its stage at diagnosis can elevate risk, which also is highest during the first few

years after treatment.

The Cleveland Clinic notes that women who develop breast cancer before age 35, which is uncommon, are more likely to experience a recurrence. In addition, women diagnosed with later stage breast cancers or rare forms of the disease, including inflammatory breast cancer, are more likely, though not guaranteed, to experience a recurrence.

The fear of breast cancer recurrence can be tough for survivors of the disease to confront. Sharing concerns with family members and a cancer care team could help survivors overcome their fears.



What to know about breast lumps

Breast cancer is a cause for concern for millions of women. Each year about 264,000 cases of breast cancer are diagnosed in women in the United States, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The Canadian Cancer Society indicates around 28,600 Canadian women will be diagnosed with breast cancer this year. Globally, data from the World Health Organization indicates roughly 2.3 million women were diagnosed with breast cancer in 2020.

One of the more notable symptoms of breast cancer is the presence of a lump in the breast. Though not all lumps are malignant, it's important that women learn about breast anatomy and lumps as part of their preventive health care routines.

Mount Sinai says that breast lumps can occur at any age in both men and women. Hormonal changes can cause breast enlargement and lumps during puberty, and boys and girls may even be born with lumps from the estrogen received from their mothers.

It is important to note that the vast majority of breast lumps are benign. The

National Institutes of Health says 60 to 80 percent of all breast lumps are non-cancerous. The most common causes of breast lumps are fibroadenomas and fibrocystic changes. Fibroadenomas are small, smooth, moveable, painless round lumps that usually affect women who are at an age to have children, indicates the Merck Manual. They are non-cancerous and feel rubbery.

Fibrocystic changes are painful, lumpy breasts. This benign condition does not increase a woman's risk for breast cancer. Symptoms often are worse right before one's menstrual period, and then improve after the period begins.

Additional factors can contribute to the formation of lumps. Breast cysts are fluid-filled sacs that likely go away on their own or may be aspirated to relieve pain. Complex cysts may need to be removed surgically. Sometimes cysts also may form in milk ducts throughout the breasts.

Lumps also may be the result of injury. Blood can collect under the skin and form a type of lump called a hematoma.



Other lumps may be traced to lipomas, which is a collection of fatty tissue or breast abscesses, which typically occur if a person is breastfeeding or has recently given birth.

Additional causes of lumps can be discussed with a doctor. Though the majority of lumps are not a cause for concern, it

is important for people to regularly feel their breasts to check for abnormalities. Doctors may recommend annual mammograms to women age 40 and older. In its earliest stages, breast cancer may produce little to no visible symptoms, but a mammogram may be able to catch something early on.

Frequently asked questions about breast cancer

The World Health Organization reports that roughly 2.3 million women were diagnosed with breast cancer in 2020. By the end of that year, there were nearly eight million women alive who had been diagnosed with the disease in the previous half decade.

A breast cancer diagnosis inevitably leads to questions about the disease. The bulk of those questions undoubtedly are asked by the millions of women who are diagnosed with breast cancer. But millions more individuals, including friends and family members of recently diagnosed women, may have their own questions. Women can discuss the specifics of their diagnosis with their physicians. In the meantime, the following are some frequently asked questions and answers that can help anyone better understand this potentially deadly disease.

What is breast cancer?

Cancer is a disease marked by the abnormal growth of cells that invade healthy cells in the body. Breast cancer is a form of the disease that begins in the cells of the breast. The National Breast Cancer Foundation notes that the cancer can then invade surrounding tissues or spread to other areas of the body.

Can exercise help to reduce my breast cancer risk?

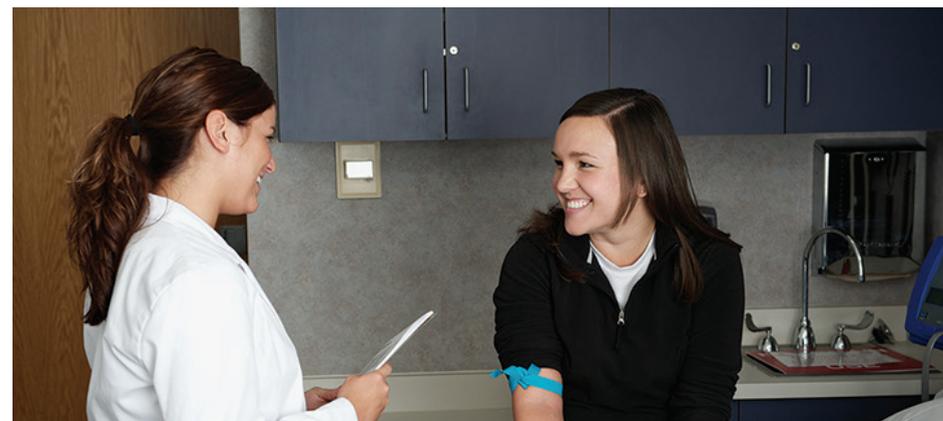
The NBCF notes that exercise strengthens the immune system and women who commit to as little as three hours of physical activity per week can begin to reduce their risk for breast cancer. However, even routine exercise does not completely eliminate a woman's risk of developing breast cancer.

Is there a link between diet and breast cancer?

The organization Susan G. Komen®, a nonprofit source of funding for the fight against breast cancer, reports that studies have shown eating fruits and vegetables may be linked to a lower risk for breast cancer, while consuming alcohol is linked to an increased risk for the disease. In addition, the NBCF reports that a high-fat diet increases breast cancer risk because fat triggers estrogen production that can fuel tumor growth.

Is there a link between oral contraceptives and breast cancer?

The NBCF reports that women who have been using birth control pills for more than



five years are at an increased risk of developing breast cancer. However, the organization notes that risk is very small because modern birth control pills contain low amounts of hormones.

Can breastfeeding reduce breast cancer risk?

Breastfeeding and breast cancer are linked, though the NBCF notes that the role breastfeeding plays in lowering cancer risk depends on how long a woman breastfeeds. The World Cancer Research Fund International notes that evidence indicates that the greater number of months women continue

breastfeeding, the greater the protection they have against breast cancer.

Is there a connection between stress and breast cancer?

The NBCF notes that researchers have found that traumatic events and losses can alter how the immune system functions, which can provide an opportunity for cancer cells to establish themselves within a person's body. The NBCF urges women to identify ways to keep their stress levels in check.

Breast cancer education can be a valuable asset as women seek to reduce their risk for the disease.



Together. We can.

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