

All Have A Reason To Race For The Cure

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Julie Armstrong wants women to act quickly when they suspect something is wrong with their bodies, because she did not.

Dr. George Stohr wants women to know the importance of mammograms.

Lindsey Donato is passionate about raising money in honor of her mom's battle against breast cancer.

They are just three of the more than 3,000 runners and walkers who will converge on Bushnell Park in Hartford Saturday morning for the Komen CT Race for the Cure. There is a 5K race, as well as a 5K walk and a 1.5K walk.

Everyone participating has a reason to be there; it might be to support and celebrate a breast cancer survivor, it might be to remember those who have died of the disease; it could be simply to raise money for research and support for those with breast cancer.

Armstrong, who will walk Saturday with 66 members of her team, felt the lump in her breast one day in the shower three years ago.

"I remember getting this sick feeling in the pit in my stomach," she said. "Then I immediately talked myself out of it."

She didn't have time to deal with breast cancer. Her father had lung cancer. She had two young daughters. She had no family history. She was only 36.

A few days later, Armstrong, of Avon, felt the lump again, this time under her armpit. Tumors don't move, do they? It couldn't be a tumor.

"I ignored it for three weeks," she said.

The message Armstrong would like to pass on to all women: Don't do what she did. Her tumor wasn't moving — it was really big. She finally told her sister about it and her sister urged her to get it checked out.

She remembers the day well. On April 26, 2010, she had a mammogram at 1 p.m., an ultrasound at 2, a biopsy at 4 p.m. and they pretty much knew at 5 p.m. that it was serious. She was diagnosed with Stage 4 breast cancer. It had spread to her liver.

She went through eight rounds of chemotherapy, a double mastectomy and 36 rounds of radiation. In 2011, she participated in her first Race for the Cure. Since then, she has raised almost \$45,000 for Komen.

Last year, she had a liver re-section, in which part of the liver is removed. Since then, she has been classified as NED — no evidence of disease.

"When you have Stage 4, they won't say you're in remission," she said.

Armstrong, whose daughters are 8 and 12 now, will take the NED classification. And she wants others to act when they are suspicious about a change in their bodies, and not wait.

"I needed to tell my story — look what I did, I sat on it," Armstrong said. "It's likely that in those three weeks I sat on it, that's when it probably traveled to my liver. I am lucky we were able to cut this out. This is what we do as moms, put ourselves on the back burners."

Stohr lost his wife, Samantha, 2 1/2 years ago to breast cancer. She was 39.

As a radiologist, he recognizes the need to get the word out to women about the importance of mammograms.

Stohr, of Farmington, will run Saturday. Meanwhile, his practice, Radiology Associates of Hartford, will have a booth set up in Bushnell Park (where the race starts and finishes) for the second consecutive year, where women can sign up for mammograms.

"There will be a 'mammo-thon,'" Stohr said. "Beginning Saturday after the race, we will have 26.2 continuous hours of mammograms."

Eighty women signed up at the race last year and came to the practice's Glastonbury office for mammograms.

"A lot of them were first-timers," he said. "We ended up detecting two breast cancers."

Donato decided to raise money after her mother, Lois, beat breast cancer twice. Lindsey, of Columbia, wanted to do something to help others. A fitness instructor at a gym in North Windham, she raised money by teaching a kickboxing class for three hours three years ago.

"The gym got more involved, with other classes and other instructors," Lindsey Donato said. "It got bigger and bigger."

So far, her "Fit for the Cure" fundraisers, which she schedules for October, Breast Cancer Awareness Month, have netted over \$13,000.

Lindsey, 25, is running the race. Last year, she led the warm-ups. Her mother, who has been a survivor for over 10 years, will walk for the first time this year.

"It's nice to do something that makes her proud," Lindsey said.

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