

A FIGHT TO THE FINISH

*Susan G. Komen for the Cure continues to fund research on **BREAST CANCER**, as well as screening for the disease. It's a race for survival.*

WHEN LYDIA LEFTWICH discovered a lump near her breast in 2003, her doctor sent her for an immediate mammogram. She soon learned she had Stage 2 breast cancer. "I was stunned," says Leftwich, who has no family history of the disease. After doctors found clusters of cancer in one breast, Leftwich had a single mastectomy, followed by chemotherapy and radiation. "It changes your complete outlook on life," says Leftwich, who has two grown children and five grandchildren. "When something like that happens, small things don't matter anymore."

Leftwich, 48, is now cancer-free. She lives in Suitland, Md., working as a senior client services associate at a financial services firm. In her spare time, she volunteers for Susan G. Komen for the Cure, the world's largest breast cancer organization, helping with preparations for its Washington, D.C., Global Race for the Cure, in which she has participated for years. "Whatever I can do to bring us one step closer to a cure," she says, "I'm all for it."

Breast cancer is the most frequently diagnosed cancer among women, affecting about 1.4 million each year worldwide and killing about 465,000 annually. Komen was founded in 1982 by Ambassador Nancy Brinker, keeping a promise to her dying sister to do all she could to end breast cancer. A nonprofit organization based in Dallas, Komen has given more than \$1.9 billion to fight breast cancer

Lydia Leftwich,
breast cancer
survivor.

230,480

The estimated number of new cases of invasive breast cancer to be diagnosed in U.S. women in 2011.

SOURCE: SUSAN G. KOMEN FOR THE CURE

over the last 29 years, and has played a role in every major advance in the fight against the disease.

The organization, supported largely by individual donations, educates the public on the importance of breast awareness and screenings through community health programs around the world. Komen encourages annual mammograms for women of average risk 40 and older, a position shared by the American Congress of Obstetricians and Gynecologists. It also funds research into causes and treatments for breast cancer, efforts that have resulted in a better prognosis for many survivors.

"In 30 years," says Brinker, who was chief of protocol for the U.S. from 2007 until January 2009, "we've had very encouraging progress with the survival rate. Today, when early-stage breast cancer is diagnosed and treated early, we have a 98% relative survival rate, versus 74% when I made the promise to my sister Suzy."

Since then, she notes, the medical community has learned that there is more than one type of breast cancer, uncovered genetic risk factors that help in assessing risk, and begun using personalized medicine to tailor treatment for individuals. "We are the largest private funder of research in the world," says Brinker. In 2011, Komen will send \$63 million worth of research grants to 56 institutions across the U.S. One recent grant supports researchers at Washington University in St. Louis who are working on a personalized breast cancer vaccine.

Another key mission is supporting community health programs, to make mammograms accessible to women with limited incomes in the U.S. and developing countries. And heading off in a new direction, Komen announced on Sept. 13 that it is teaming up with the George W. Bush Institute, the U.S. State Department, and UNAIDS to expand the availability of vital breast and cervical cancer screening and treatment, and to scale up access to HIV services for women at risk in sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America. Says Brinker: "We want to lead." ●



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