

Reaching for More Than Recovery

by Kay Johnson



"A lot of it is that you think, 'it won't happen to me.' You don't get sick, you don't have headaches, you don't have a fever, you don't feel anything ... not when it's tiny, not when it's in the stage where it's really curable. You know you're fine."

Doris Rosenbaum is talking about breast cancer.

A cancer survivor herself, Rosenbaum is a tireless advocate for making screening mammograms available to every woman in Kentucky.

"She's touched so many lives I wouldn't know where to begin ...," says Rosemary Graves, receptionist at the Breast Diagnostic Center in Radiology at the UK Medical Center. "I've known her for many years. I was her Reach for Recovery volunteer when she was first diagnosed with breast cancer — then about seven years ago when I had to have a second surgery, and my other breast was removed, I found out what true friendship is. She was right there with me every minute. Last Sunday in church Father said something that applies to Doris: 'A friend is a gift from God to be treasured more than gold.' She is my gift."

And, so it seems, a gift to all of the women of Kentucky.

Her interest in helping others led to volunteering at the UK Hospital over 20 years ago. Then, about 10 years ago she joined the Thursday Group, a support group of women who have had breast



Doris Rosenbaum, a tireless volunteer in the battle against breast cancer, believes "It's nice when people give of themselves. It's just the thing to do."

Photo by Mark Kidd.

cancer who meet once a month. "We enjoy getting together so much — there are a lot of little questions that you ask each other about feelings, and about physical characteristics after you've had surgery. You hate to keep calling your doctor all the time — women can answer each other's questions," says Rosenbaum. "It's this group of women, especially, who recognized the need for early detection in breast cancer."

Her concern for early detection led Rosenbaum to spearhead the effort of making screening mammography avail-

able to women all over the state, no matter their income. She says, "If somebody needs to choose between buying shoes for their kids, or if the refrigerator needs fixing, they're going to do those things before spending \$100 or \$150 for a test that will probably be negative."

The women decided to ask the General Assembly to mandate that insurance companies already covering breast cancer treatment, pay at least \$50 toward a screening mammogram. The fee for a screening mammogram can be as high as \$180. "We started talking to legislators and organizations across the state telling them of the importance of early detection, and the importance of having screening mammography covered by insurance." Rosenbaum also wanted free screening mammograms made available to medically indigent women.

When legislation was proposed in 1989, Dr. Gilbert H. Friedell, director for cancer control for the Lucille Parker Markey Cancer Center, recalls that Rosenbaum primarily was responsible for mobilizing women across the state to support it. "The women called everyone in sight. One legislator was heard to complain to other legislators that these women were using unfair tactics, and said, 'why, they even called my wife.'

"Doris moved from being an important member of a support group to the role of major responsibility for the idea of enhancing and encouraging screening for breast cancer," says Friedell.