

Neighbors knitting for a cause

There's an Irish Proverb that says, "If the knitter is weary, the baby will have no new bonnet." A group of women at Holmstad, a Covenant Retirement Community in Batavia, and self proclaimed



Knitters at Holmstad are serious about their volunteer work for Delnor. Pictured left to right are Good Neighbors Ruth Anderson and Inez Olander and fellow neighbor and knitter Verna Larson

"knot wits" are anything but weary. They've taken this proverb to heart and as a group knit up to 1,500 bonnets a year for newborn babies at Delnor Hospital.

Ruth Anderson and Inez Olander are both in their 90s and are not even close to retiring their knitting needles. The ladies have been friends since becoming neighbors at Holmstad almost 20 years ago. They knit whenever they can, while waiting for dinner or whenever they feel like it since the bonnet projects don't take up much room.

The bonnets are made from donated baby yarn. They're the same bonnets placed on newborn babies shortly after they are born and cleaned up to keep them warm. The knitters have kept track of every bonnet they've made throughout the years and they have the logs to prove it. Anderson says that now these women, many in their 90s, even keep track of everything on the computer. While they don't have the names of all the babies who leave the hospital with their bonnets, they sometimes get thank you notes or photos.

Anderson, a Chicago native, has been a widow for 12 years. She and her husband moved to Holmstad together 20 years ago. She's been knitting almost her

entire life and says "there's so much to do, so many things to make." "Aunt Ruth" as she's known to generations of relatives, doesn't have time to sit around and do nothing. On top of the bonnets she makes for Delnor, there are three babies in the family who will be expecting booties very soon.

Olander moved to Holmstad 18 years ago. A retired professor at North Park University, she says she had a great job – she was a P.E. teacher. She's like the "Old Woman in the Shoe," and while she never married and had a family of her own, her kids were always her students. A self-proclaimed "boonie character," Olander moved to Batavia because it was a place away from the city and just where she wanted to be.

Knitters often form a unique bond, and these fellow residents and knitters have done just that. "It's melded our friendship together," said Anderson. "You can look at a person and tell if you'll be friends, we've worked on so many craft projects together too," she added.

"It's too boring to sit around and do nothing," said Olander.

Thousands of babies and their families are thankful these ladies are not just sitting around.

From breast cancer victim to survivor... in five years

This storeyteller tells her story



Visit Donna online at: www.DonnaDettman.com

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Neighbors of Batavia wants to recognize a Good Neighbor in each issue. Nominations are always welcome. Email kish@emeraldmarketing.com with your Good Neighbor story suggestions.

Donna Dettman: One woman's journey through breast cancer

Chances are, everyone reading this article knows of someone with breast cancer. The statistics are overwhelming, with a new diagnosis every three minutes. But what happens when it's you? When it's your family?

Donna Dettman has lived in Batavia for 19 years. She and her husband Mark raised two kids here—now ages 23 and 21. They have a strong faith, go to church, are active in the community and love to laugh. Donna has worked at the St. Charles Library in the children's services department for 18 years and used this passion for stories to become a storyteller, bringing her performance to schools, libraries and festivals in the area.

One night in November 2001

while waiting for her then teenage daughter Mary to come home from an evening out, Donna was lying down on the sofa and rolled over and felt a golf ball-sized lump in her breast. She knew at that moment her life would never be the same.

"I wanted to make it go away, I just wanted to go back five minutes in time before I found the lump," she says.

Within three weeks—and she adds even with an HMO insurance program—she had a mastectomy and was preparing to start a grueling path of chemotherapy. Doctors offered her a chance for a second opinion, but she says "I just wanted them to take it off."

Admitting that she's a deep thinker and tends to dig deep

into "life," this experience with breast cancer has taken Donna and her family on a path that has forever changed their lives. Taking her passion for storytelling and applying it to her life, Donna now takes her performance "A Bend in the Road: One Woman's Journey through Breast Cancer," to groups in Chicago and other parts of the country. As she began to journal during her recovery, she came up with a Cancer Chronology—three different steps to recovery that we're calling stages.

Stage I -- A year of healing

As anyone with breast cancer will share, once a lump is discovered, patients can look forward to a year of biopsies, surgeries, chemo, radiation if necessary, more mammograms and blood tests and possibly five more years of preventative hormonal therapy. It's a year consumed with doctors and nurses. The patient's life revolves around appointments and recovery.

Donna chose to have a mastectomy, admitting she's small chested, so having the procedure was no huge loss from that perspective. Society is fascinated with women's bodies and especially breasts, but to Donna it's just a "boob." She chose not to have reconstruction surgery right away, instead letting her body and mind heal for the year. She credits her family and friends for helping her get through it. After finding out she had cancer, her husband Mark assured her "we'll beat this together."

In her show *A Bend in the Road*, Donna talks about her husband...

Mark did everything else. Mark listened to doctors when I couldn't, cried when I couldn't, held me when I could. Mark stayed home long enough in the morning to fix the kids' lunch and get them off to school, get home in time to

fix supper, and somehow worked in between. Mark tended to my medical needs – bandaging my mastectomy scar when I couldn't even look at it. Mark, as always, was my rock, my support, my best friend.

Mark also checked the mail when he got home from work—a routine that turned out to be a high point of the day. Donna had a friend who sent a funny card every week for the year – many of these cards are in her show today. "Fan mail" as her family called it, small notes of encouragement helped get her through. She says people would call and ask what they could do for help. One time, with the refrigerator full of meals, she just needed a pair of pants hemmed and that's what a friend did.

Donna's year of treatment ended with a decision to get reconstruction surgery. After realizing she didn't want to go downstairs in her pajamas because she never felt "dressed" (complete with a bra and prosthetic breast), she chose to have reconstruction. "I had one and got another one because, well, it looked funny and I figured I might as well have two," she says.

With her new "boob," hair starting to thicken, and "release" from the doctors and nurses she had seen on a regular basis, Donna knew it was time for another passage. It was time to heal the mind following a year of revolving her schedule around cancer.

Stage II -- A year of discovery

Donna had been keeping a journal throughout the first year. She began writing for herself, as a way to deal with and process her feelings. Her writing was informal and she wrote ramblings and whatever came to mind. Often she wrote in church. "Mark grew very used to me scribbling on my bulletin during the service. I ended up with bits, lots

of bits," she says.

In her year of discovery Donna learned more about who she is and realized she is no longer interested in what others think she should be. She's more willing to try new things and even tried zip-lining on a recent vacation. Now she also appreciates the need to stop. "I appreciate the gift of a walk – alone

with my thoughts, no music, no audio book. I appreciate the gift of watching life, of resting, of looking at the flowers and the changing



Donna and her family enjoy a vacation in Hawaii



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Nick Dettman, now 21, yet wise beyond his years. "You never really see someone's true colors until they're face-to-face with difficulties and hardships, and my mom's were more vibrant as any I've seen. She has the amazing ability to take the lemons that life gives her and not only make lemonade, but also grinds the peel into zest and plants the seeds to grow more lemons," he adds

Donna takes time out to laugh with Nick and Mary

seasons," says Donna.

Donna's "Stage II" was also something new to the family. As survivors going through treatment all say, the first year is all about the medical "stuff." While her children were teenagers at the time, Donna tried to share her feelings and information whenever they asked. She kept their lives as normal as possible, encouraging them to have friends come over and to do the usual high school things. "I tried to keep our lives centered around the activities, not around my cancer."

"Going through what happened gave me a completely new and different view of my mom," says

life that God gave her. This self-discovery leads to her storytelling performance *A Bend in the Road*. Two years after treatment she started looking through all of her notes and put them into poems, songs and ultimately a storytelling performance. This show takes her audience on an emotional roller coaster ride down her road of discovery, apprehension and her ultimate determination to survive. And it's full of humor which is essential to Donna.

"My dad says that when you stop laughing it means you have given up," said Donna.

Her personal bend in the road also has lead her to reflect on the many gifts she has received. Like the gift of friendship. When she had her mastectomy, the department at the St. Charles library was having a staff meeting at the time and decided to take time instead to pray the "Our Father" on her behalf. Her kids have grown and her marriage has grown as well. Donna uses this line in her show—"It's humbling to be cared for by others, not because you ask, but because you need."

While Donna could sit back and just enjoy life, she's putting her passion to work. Last March an enthusiastic crowd gathered to 'Celebrate Life with Attitude!' in support of the American Cancer Society. Shannon Hall was filled with stories, music and laughter.

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Best of all \$1,900 was raised for the American Cancer Society. Donna is hoping to bring her performance into more communities (see box).

Donna has added a new program to her workshops called *Your Bend in the Road*. In this program she helps participants use story to process their own traumatic event – not just cancer or breast cancer in particular. "Everybody has had traumas in their lives. What do you do with that? How do you make sense of it? How do you go forward," says Donna.

Her offering

As a cancer survivor, Donna is full of advice for those newly diagnosed or going through the many stages of healing. She took advantage of support groups at Delnor since LivingWell was not in existence at the time. She had the support of family, friends and coworkers and acknowledges that women in particular need to learn to ask for help. "We moms have a hard time doing that, but you can't give out of an empty well," she says.

In the meantime, she'll keep discovering and telling her stories in hope of reaching more women and their families—knowing that in the time it takes to read this article, at least two more women have been diagnosed with breast cancer.

Visit Donna online at: www.DonnaDettman.com



Survivor Care Lifestyle Program designed for the Cancer Patient at Delnor Health & Wellness Center

Exercise has many benefits for cancer patients; it not only helps to tolerate cancer treatments such as chemotherapy or radiation therapy, it also helps to feel better physically and emotionally. Patients who have completed chemotherapy and are now looking towards survivorship are often faced with many long-term side effects of treatment — exercise can help manage many of these problems such as osteoporosis and weight gain.

Delnor Health & Wellness Center's new Survivor Care Program is a lifestyle maintenance program that is designed for cancer patients who have completed physical therapy and would like to continue with an exercise program specifically-designed for them. The program includes one-on-one supervision by a personal trainer with a four year degree in a health-related field, a national personal training certification, and a certificate of completion in a cancer specific personal training workshop.

A participant in the Survivor Care Program at the Health & Wellness Center can expect the following:

- Personal interview
- Health assessment
- Equipment orientation
- Individual exercise prescription
- One hour personal training session per month
- One hour massage per month

Program Benefits

The support of a family member or friend can be very beneficial and a motivating factor while working towards developing a healthier lifestyle. The Survivor Care Program allows for a family member or friend to train with the survivor during the sessions, with the purchase of a \$25/month guest pass or membership.

Program Requirements

Participants in the Survivor Care Program are required to obtain the following prior to program entry:

1. Written physician's approval
2. Completed health history form
3. All participants must be 18 years or older

For More Information

Please contact the Membership Department at Delnor Health & Wellness Center, 208-3358 for pricing information. Delnor H&W Center is located at 296 Randall Road, Geneva, IL.

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