

Partners for Breast Cancer Care

Provides mammograms and treatment to the uninsured

Bay Scroggins



Janet Darnell, Director of Partners for Breast Cancer Care at HealthPark in Fort Myers

Partners for Breast Cancer Care is located at 9470 HealthPark Circle in Fort Myers. For more information on services and how to donate, visit www.ptbcc.org or call (239) 454-8583.

"Susan G. Komen gives us a very nice grant now that they have a local affiliation. Building Better Lives (Arthur Rutenberg) and From Our Hearts (Pine Island) are second. Fundraising is anything from a Legal/Medical Golf Tournament to The Dunes of Sanibel Tennis Tournament to John Michaels Fine Jewelry hosting a fundraiser in Cape Coral. We just never know who will donate to our organization (like the community of Pelican Preserve, who raised \$40,000 for us last year)" — Janet Darnell

Janet Darnell's life changed 11 years ago. She knew she needed a mammogram, but didn't know how she was going to pay for it.

"I was a single mother with 2 children, cleaning houses, I had no health insurance, living paycheck to paycheck."

In October, a TV program about Breast Cancer Awareness Month encouraged Janet to scrape together money she really needed for groceries and gas to get a mammogram. Little did she know, it would come back with unsettling news. Doctors told her she had tiny, micro-calcifications in her left breast and needed a needle biopsy to determine whether the spots were breast cancer. The mammogram's cost had already broken the bank for Janet.

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Not knowing where to turn, she was told to contact **Partners for Breast Cancer Care in South Fort Myers**. The community-funded center helps people with low income and no insurance get mammograms and breast cancer treatment. **Partners** paid for Janet's needle biopsy. The results confirmed doctors' suspicions and Janet's world came crashing down. **"I had breast cancer,"** she says with a quiver in her voice. Because the cancer was spotted early, Janet is alive today — alive and helping thousands of women as the director of the organization that saved her own life. **"Now, I am able to relate to everybody that comes through our door because I've been there."**

Partners for Breast Cancer Care began in 1991 with grant money. **"We started literally knocking on doors in the low-income areas of Lee County to get women to get mammograms,"** says Janet. Today, mammograms, biopsies, ultrasounds, even surgery are paid for with money from grants and generous people in Southwest Florida. More than 100 partners including doctors, pathologists, and anesthesiologists agreed to offer their services at low cost. Last year alone, the organization conducted more than 800 procedures. At **Partners**, the average patient is 45-years-old and the youngest breast cancer patient was a single mother that had a double mastectomy at just 22-years-old. According to www.breastcancer.org, every 3 minutes a woman is diagnosed with breast cancer in the US. Close to 200,000 new cases are

diagnosed each year. With breast cancer among the leading causes of death in women, early detection and prevention are keys to survival.

Breast cancer is not just a woman's fight. **"Men can get breast cancer too, we helped 8 men with getting mammograms, ultrasounds and biopsies."** says Janet. The American Cancer Society reports about 1,200 men in the US are diagnosed with breast cancer each year.

By helping people with breast cancer begin their journey toward recovery, Janet gives back to the organization that helped her. She says as Southwest Florida's population grows, so does the need for breast cancer prevention and treatment. Currently, the organization is faced with increasing numbers of women coming from the Hispanic communities of Lee County. **"The phones never stop, we get about 20 calls a day,"** she says. Unfortunately, **Partners** can't take every patient — some just don't meet the strict income requirements. Even with many medical services provided at reduced costs, last year, expenses reached more than \$125,000. That's why community support is vital to keep **Partners for Breast Cancer Care** in business.

If Janet could do one thing during the month of October, it's encourage everyone to get a mammogram. Whether it eases their minds or changes their lives, like it did hers, Janet knows first-hand, **"Everyone that comes to our office, leaves here with hope."**