

'YOU FEEL LIKE A MILLION DOLLARS'



RANDY GRIFFITH/THE TRIBUNE-DEMOCRAT

Left to right, Marlene Singer, of Somerset and Johnstown Walk of Hope, Andi Palmar, of Operation BeYoutiful, and Nina Miller, of Nu/Hart Hair, organize fundraisers to help women with breast cancer.

Wigs and walks benefit cancer patients

BY RANDY GRIFFITH
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A local charity supplying wigs for women with medical hair loss and an expanded Walk of Hope fundraiser for cancer care are two examples of community support for patients, leaders say.

"It's a collaboration of people working toward the same goal of people trying to help cancer patients," Johnstown Walk of Hope coordinator Marlene Singer said.

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**MARLENE SINGER,
JOHNSTOWN
WALK OF HOPE
COORDINATOR**

Founded in 2016 through the Community Foundation of the Alleghenies, Johnstown Walk of Hope this year expanded to add the Somerset Walk of Hope fund. The Somerset fund helps those receiving care through Joyce Murtha Breast Care Center at Chan Soon-Shiong Medical Center at Windber.

The organization also supports patients of the

Conemaugh Cancer Center and UPMC Hillman Cancer Center at John Murtha Pavilion in Johnstown, as well as the Children Are Precious Fund for childhood cancer patients.

"All donations stay in the area, and every penny goes to local people and families," Singer said.

Last year, more than 80 cancer patients received financial assistance.

Despite the Walk of Hope's namesake event being canceled during the pandemic shutdown, a virtual walk raised more than \$32,000, almost matching the 2018 walk's \$36,927 and well over the \$20,000 goal, Singer said.

Last year's event raised \$55,350.

Walk of Hope coordinates with other breast cancer support efforts, including Taunia Oechslein Girls Night Out Foundation and the new Operation: BeYoutiful charity, Singer said.

"Operation: BeYoutiful provides wigs for women of all ages while going through any kind of medical hair loss," board member Andi Palmar said.

The charity began after a friend of Palmar was diagnosed with breast cancer in 2015 and lost her hair during treatment.

Palmar's daughter, Lauren Palmar, attended an event organized to lift up the friend and raise funds for a high-quality wig.

Operation: BeYoutiful

Lauren Palmar was inspired

to found Operation: BeYoutiful, with a mission of instilling hope, inspiration and confidence in girls battling medically related hair loss. This year, the mission expanded to help women as well.

The charity works with Nu/Hart Hair, at 103 College Park Plaza in Richland. The business provides the wigs at cost and donates all the styling services, Andi Palmar said.

The wigs are designated as "cranial prosthesis" for medical insurance purposes.

They can truly lift a woman's spirits while facing cancer diagnosis and treatment, Palmar said, noting that some women say hair loss was the most difficult part of having breast cancer.

Nu/Hart Hair owner Nina Miller said she has seen the transformation in women when they receive their new wig.

"It's so rewarding," Miller said. "When you do this every day for work, you get a paycheck. When you are doing it to help someone, you feel like a million dollars. People have said it changed their life."

'Power in numbers'

Walk of Hope and Operation: BeYoutiful have begun working with other organizations helping breast cancer patients, including the Joyce Murtha Breast Care Center.

"There is power in numbers," Palmar said.

"We are all connected," Singer said. "Before, we were close,

but we were so far apart. Now, we work together to expand the resources that these patients have."

The community support has allowed the Joyce Murtha center to serve more patients and expand the services offered, Director Erin Goins said.

Much of the support goes to the Pink Ribbon Fund for those who can't afford screening

mammograms or cancer diagnostic services, she said.

"We have done a lot of things with technology with the help of the community, which raises money for us," Goins said. "Girls Night Out is the biggest, but there are a lot of little groups."

"We are grateful for all of that."

The breast center's own fundraiser, the Color Me Pink Run/

Walk, is scheduled be held Oct. 24, Goins said.

"We were thinking about doing it virtually," she said.

"But we don't gather inside, so there's plenty of social distancing."

Randy Griffith covers health care for The Tribune-Democrat. Follow him on Twitter @photogriffer57.

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