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Missions

Beating Breast Cancer

Designing Bras for the Cause

By Noelle Robbins

Photography by Lane Hartwell



Beaded, bejeweled, befeathered and bedazzling. Shimmering shades of ocean green and blue, floating wispy veils of pink and fuchsia, dripping sparkly strings of crystals: truly imaginative, glamorous creations. Gala ball gowns? No, bras. □ And not just any bras—bras for a cause.

These silky, gauzy works of art—evoking mermaids and harem girls—are the result of a heartfelt effort spearheaded in Alameda by Sue Devlin. She and her business partner, Diane Cunningham Rizzo, co-owners of The Wolf and The Hare, recently embraced an opportunity to support the Susan G. Komen Foundation and breast cancer awareness. The shop owners helped raise money by participating in the Bras for the Cause Moonlight Walk on Sept. 8, 2006, a fundraising event sponsored by Tri-Valley SOCKs, an acronym for Stepping Out for Cancer Kures. The leisurely 10-kilometer stroll, held in Pleasanton, drew more than 300 bra-clad walkers.

Devlin, the mother of three young daughters, is no stranger to community service. Long active as a school and Girl Scout volunteer, she also treasures her seven-year involvement with a more personal group. Devlin is one of six women of different ages and backgrounds who regularly gather to socialize and work on artistic projects.

“We are a crafty group,” Devlin says, “and [in 2006] we decided to devote our efforts to a worthy cause.” When one of the members was approached by Kathy Ellis (co-founder of Tri-Valley SOCKs) to participate in Bras for the Cause, “It seemed like a perfect fit, no pun intended, for our group, because we could use our creative talents to benefit a great cause and have fun doing it.”

Devlin is grateful that her own experience with breast cancer has been minimal: She has no family history and no friends her age have been diagnosed with this much-feared disease. But she takes nothing for granted. The gift she has promised herself for her 40th birthday? Her first mammogram.

Rizzo’s journey to Bras for the Cause took a different path. She, too, is a mother and longtime action-oriented community volunteer. In fact, both she and Devlin—who became acquainted at their children’s preschool—were, unbeknownst to the other, simultaneously involved with the Midway Shelter. While Devlin helped prepare meals, Rizzo was a driving force behind the annual toy drive.

Rizzo’s personal story does include experience with cancer. Her mother, cousin and an aunt are all, thankfully, breast cancer survivors. Both her father and brother, sadly, succumbed to lung cancer.

For Rizzo, promoting Bras for the Cause at The Wolf and The Hare was a no-brainer. So while Devlin and her group crafted bras both elegant and fantastical, the store set up information on the project to solicit donations for the Moonlight Walk. It was what happened after the walk that most surprised and delighted the two businesswomen.

Rizzo and Devlin were inspired to hang the elaborately embellished bras in their shop in hopes of generating additional funds for breast cancer awareness. What they also generated was a lot of buzz.

After relating the Bras for the Cause story—and letting shoppers know the bras were for sale to the highest bidder through a silent auction—as more than a fundraising effort, energy started to build. Breast cancer survivors came in, and there were many “high-fives over the counter, long embraces in the aisles,” says Rizzo.

Devlin and Rizzo are already working on the next Bras for the Cause Moonlight Walk, in September. Devlin plans more teams and more daring, darling bras. And she is offering her wisdom and creative insights to women (and men) who need coaching on team organization, or bra decorating.

Rizzo would like to expand the concept of undies as awareness and fundraising tools. Her vision? “Jockstraps for the Cause,” to bring attention to prostate cancer.

Bawdy—like beauty—is in the eye of the beholder. Donning resplendent unmentionables for a walk in the moonlight on behalf of a good cause—brilliant!

GET INVOLVED

For more information about local participation in the upcoming Bras for the Cause Moonlight Walk or to volunteer for Jockstraps for the Cause, contact The Wolf and The Hare, 883-B1 Island Drive, at (510) 521-9277, wolfandhare@sbcglobal.net. For additional information at www.trivalleysocks.org, click on Bras for the Cause Walk.