

Maine Breast Cancer Coalition

Twenty Years of Volunteerism and Service

by Carol Beagan, twenty-year volunteer

June 2012

It is hard to believe that it has been twenty years since a small group of breast cancer patients and their friends and family members joined our leader, Linda Morneault, to hold the first Breast Cancer Awareness Walk in Bangor. It was a very emotional day, as twenty years ago the survival rate for breast cancer was much lower than it is today. It was to be the beginning of a long journey for many of these women. Many of the leaders of the breast cancer community have lost their battle with breast cancer, but some of the original members of the [Maine Breast Cancer Coalition](#), which was formed in 1992, are still active and still advocating for better health care for all.

In 1993, several Maine women attended the first [National Breast Cancer Coalition](#) Advocacy Training Conference in Washington, D.C. We met with our state senators and representatives and urged them to support more research for breast cancer. In 1993, we held another Breast Cancer Awareness Walk in Bangor. Our crowd had grown considerably, and one of the walkers was Bangor oncologist, Dr. Thomas Openshaw, who is still taking care of many of our women twenty years later. Another original member, Linda Ziegler, also held a walk in Rockland.

In the fall of 1993, thirteen Maine women attended a walk in Washington, D.C., where 250,000 women from all over the country and many from other countries presented President Clinton with 2.6 million signatures to represent the number of women living with breast cancer. Linda Morneault and Laurel Bezanson were chosen to represent us in the White House to meet President and Mrs. Clinton. The walk was a huge step in increasing the budget for breast cancer research.

Over the years, we have held many symposiums and testified at the State House many times regarding health care for women. We also have been represented in Washington, D.C. each year to advocate for more research and attend workshops to learn about the latest in breast cancer care.

One of our most moving exhibits was "The Face of Breast Cancer". It was an exhibit that traveled all over the United States for one year. With the help of the Steven and Tabitha King Foundation, we were able to present it at the South Portland Mall and the Bangor Mall. It was a collection of portraits of women who had lost their lives to breast cancer. There were two Maine women represented in the display. Years later, also with the help of the Kings, we were able to present [Dr. Susan Love](#) at a free conference in Augusta.

In October 1995, we took part along with members of the American Cancer Society and the Maine Breast and Cervical Health Program in the first Silver Tea for Breast Cancer Awareness hosted by First Lady Mary Herman.

Also in October 1995, Randa Shirland attended the Better Health Foundation training seminar for breast cancer resource guides in California. This would be the start of a two-year project to gather information about breast health resources to distribute at no cost to doctors' offices, breast care centers, hospitals, clinics, and individuals interested in breast care. In 1997, the first ever Maine Breast Cancer Coalition *Breast Cancer Resource Guide* was published, and we introduced it in Washington, D.C. to thousands of women attending the NBCC Conference. The late Heather Gilchrest was the designer, and she and Randa Shirland were co-project managers. Many of our MBCC members helped with the research and editing on this project. As soon as the guide was released, we started to receive calls from uninsured or underinsured women of all ages, asking where to get financial help for mammograms and breast care. We began to work on how we could raise money to help these women.

In 2000, we were contacted by Dan DeLuca, a master swimmer from southern Maine whose mother had just been diagnosed with breast cancer. He was going to swim the length of Moosehead Lake and donate

the pledge money raised to the MBCC. His first attempt was unsuccessful, as the weather turned very wild. Even though he was not able to complete the swim, he raised approximately \$15,000 and we were on our way. That year we also received a grant from [Susan G. Komen Maine®](#), and we were able to help approximately fifty women through our newly launched [Support Service Fund](#). The next year, Dan attempted the swim again; this time he was successful and raised over \$25,000 for us.

Since that time, we have helped more than 2,000 Maine women and men with expenses not covered by insurance, including medical, household, travel and other miscellaneous expenses, and have raised over \$1,000,000 through many sources: grant-making organizations, including the Komen Maine Affiliate, the Maine Cancer Foundation, and the Borman Family Foundation; also funding through DHHS/Maine Breast and Cervical Health Program contract funds supported by a Cooperative Agreement from the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; the Maine Breast Cancer Specialty License Plate Program; donations from many businesses and small community groups including the York Hospital Breast Cancer Survivors Group, the Greater Bangor Area Women's Ski/Snowboard Club, Maine Fraternal Order of Eagles Groups, PATCO Construction, and individual contributions by members and supporters of MBCC.

We have received many honors and recognition for our volunteer work over the years. To list a few, in 2000, Rosemarie LeGasse and I were chosen to be on the panel at the President's Cancer Panel at the University of Vermont Hospital. MBCC was chosen as a "Many Hands" organization by Channel 6, received the Cure Breast Cancer for ME "Citizen Advocate Award", Lymphedema Patient Advocacy Award, "2 Those Who Care" Volunteer Agency of Distinction Award from WLBZ Channel 2, and have received hundreds of letters from people whom we have helped. These people shared their heartbreaking stories about what it meant to them to be able to pay a bill or keep their family together while going through treatment. This is why we do what we do.

Finally, we wouldn't have been able to do all of this without the help of many, many people who gave us money and support over the years and without the volunteers who stayed with us for many years.

Thank you to the MBCC founding group and our long-time volunteers: Fran, Heather, Barbara, Rachel, Diane, Randa, Anne, Jean, Martha, Laurel, Pat, Linda, Carol, Pam, Ro, Chris, Carmen, Nancy, Cathy, Agatha, Elaine, Terry, Joyce, Betty Lou, Sara, Selena, Meredith, and my son, Michael Beagan, who redesigned our *Resource Guide* and letterhead in 2004, designed our logo and brochures, and designed the home page for our website in 2005. I know I probably have forgotten someone and I apologize ahead of time. It has been an honor and a privilege to work with all of these caring women and to be able to take part in helping so many people when they were very vulnerable.