

DEANNE ZURCHER - 2010 HONORARY SURVIVOR CHAIR

Seven-year breast cancer survivor Deanne Zurcher's breast cancer diagnosis has turned into a life-changing journey.

The 42-year old Orion woman was first diagnosed in October of 2003 at the age of 36 with breast cancer in her right breast. She underwent a double mastectomy, chemotherapy, and reconstructive surgery. In 2006, she had a recurrence of the disease, which was then treated with radiation and oral forms of treatment. And, in April of 2007, the cancer metastasized, as tiny nodules were found in Zurcher's lungs. She found her first lump herself, about a year after having a mammogram.

"You're the only one that really knows your body. Self-exams are so important," Zurcher said.

Zurcher now has weekly chemotherapy treatments in effort to keep the cancer from growing, and she says the treatments are tolerable.

And, she is on the waiting list for a clinical trial in Maryland. She's eligible for the trial because of the results of her gene testing.

"It's a par-prohibitor trial. It changes the DNA of cancer cells, and through that prevents them from growing," she said.

Zurcher is a supporter of gene testing, particularly since her results could help her sisters and two daughters be more aware of their risk of getting breast cancer.

"My sister is undergoing preventative methods. Without the gene testing, her health insurance wouldn't have covered them," Zurcher said.

The former jazzercise instructor, wife of 24 years, and mother of four children doesn't let her breast cancer diagnosis consume her.

"It's just something I do. My children keep me so busy. They keep me focused and create a diversion, so there's not a lot of time to dwell," she said.

Through her role as honorary survivor chair, Zurcher hopes people realize that breast cancer patients can live happy, successful lives while undergoing treatment.

"Breast cancer has changed my life for the better. I appreciate every day, every person in my life," she said.

Zurcher was nominated for the honorary survivor role by three nurses in Dr. Stewart Garneau's oncology office.

"Deanne just has such a positive attitude. She exudes the positivity you wouldn't expect a cancer patient to have, especially in her stressful situation," said nurse Jenny Pearson.