

PHOTOGRAPHY BY JIM PRISCHING

# Everyone in this photo is living with breast cancer



## NORTH SHORE WOMEN EMBRACE OPTIMISM, THRIVE AFTER CHILLING BREAST CANCER DIAGNOSIS

■ BY BILL MCLEAN

Cara Novy-Bennewitz picked the perfect time to face one of her fears three years ago.

It was Snowflake Week at Old Orchard Junior High School in Skokie. Snowflake is an annual program designed to keep healthy kids healthy. The program's theme in 2009: "Face Your Fears."

Novy-Bennewitz, a Wilmette resident who's a physical education teacher at the school, faced more than 200 seventh- and eighth-grade students at Snowflake's wrap-up session in Old Orchard's gym.

The floor was hers.

"All of the kids were sitting in the bleachers, and as I looked around I told them I was just like them in a way, that I too was afraid of not fitting in," recalls Novy-Bennewitz, now 49.

She spoke some more, before bowing in front of all those eyes and reaching for the back of her neck with her right hand.

Off came her wig.

Only a handful of people in the gym had known she'd been wearing a wig. Novy-Bennewitz returned to an upright position, smiling and revealing a short-cropped hairstyle that would have looked perfectly normal in a boot camp.

The students in the bleachers, meanwhile, were no longer sitting. They all were standing, cheering and stomping for a woman who had stared at a diagnosis of breast cancer a year earlier and conquered it.

Jolan Silcroft, also a PE teacher at the school, witnessed the moment.

"Cara had told me, earlier that day, what she was planning to do," Silcroft says. "She had also removed the wig for me in a locker room. When she took it off, in front of all those kids, the gym turned loud, crazy-loud."

"While they were showing her so much support and so much love, I was bawling."

October is Breast Cancer Awareness month. There are 15 types of breast cancer, and nearly 250,000 women (and 2,200 men) in the United States were diagnosed with forms of invasive breast cancer last year. But so many of the survivors, like Novy-Bennewitz, are thriving daily, inspiring family and friends and speaking candidly and enthusiastically about their lives since hearing three sobering words: "You have cancer."

Novy-Bennewitz, also a personal trainer, was home alone when she received her diagnosis during a phone call.

"After I hung up I was too shocked to cry," she says.

But the eternal optimist in Novy-Bennewitz allowed her to look forward to her tomorrows.

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## REVIEW

### Highland Park

■ District 112 teachers announced a strike on Tuesday, Oct. 16. All classes in the district – which encompasses eight elementary schools, three middle schools and the Green Bay Early Childhood Program – were canceled that day.

According to the North Shore Education Association (NSEA), the District 112 board's offer would cause the teachers' highest salary to fall behind 18 other Lake County districts. The NSEA has also filed unfair labor practice charges with the Illinois Educational Labor Relations Board.

Teachers will not receive insurance during the duration of the strike, which affects students in Highland Park, Highwood and Fort Sheridan.

### Lake Forest

■ Republican Congressman Bob Dold and Democratic challenger Brad Schneider faced off during a 10th District debate at Lake Forest High School on Sunday afternoon.

Dold, from Kenilworth, and Schneider, from Deerfield, traded jabs for about an hour over a host of issues, such as the Affordable Care Act. They both touted their bipartisan credentials.

The candidates are slated to appear on Fox News at 8:30 a.m. Sunday, Oct. 21 and on WTTW Channel 11 on Tuesday, Oct. 23 at 6:30 p.m. in their final debate.

### Winnetka

■ The village placed its 2013 proposed budget online this month for residents to view.

Among the suggested changes from 2012: 3% increases on more than a dozen permits and fees, from roof permits to water meter fees. No increases were proposed for purchasing licenses, from vehicle to business.

## PREVIEW

### North Shore

■ Early voting will begin across the North Shore Monday, Oct. 22. It will run until Saturday, Nov. 3. Please check the Lake County Web site at <https://countyclerk.lakecountyil.gov> to find out what you need to do to vote early and where to vote in your community.

### Lake Forest

■ The Historic Preservation Commission – which reviews projects that are inside the boundaries of the city's Historic Districts and projects that affect individual landmark properties – will meet on Wednesday, Oct. 24 at 6:30 p.m. at City Hall, 220 E. Deerpath. The meeting will be broadcast live and rebroadcast Saturday at 6:30 p.m. and Sundays at 8 a.m. on Channel 17 in Lake Forest. A DVD copy of the meeting will be available at the Lake Forest Library.

### Wilmette

■ The Wilmette Village Board will meet on Tuesday, Oct. 23 at 7:30 p.m. in the Village Hall Council Room, second floor, at 1200 Wilmette Ave. Meetings are broadcast live on cable Channel 6 and replayed the following day at 1 p.m. For more information, please check [www.wilmette.com](http://www.wilmette.com).

### Winnetka

■ The Cherry Street Bridge in Winnetka will be closed for at least 10 days, starting Monday, Oct. 22. Traffic will be detoured to Oak Street. Alliance Contractors will perform the work. Please call the Public Works Department at (847) 716-3568 with questions.



These North Shore women are still standing and thriving after their breast cancer diagnosis. PHOTOGRAPHY BY JIM PRISCHING

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"With breast cancer, there has always been a lot of emphasis on early detection, on prevention, on awareness," she says. "And I'm all for that, totally for that. But more focus, I believe, should be on what survivors have been doing since their diagnosis, how they're coping and how they're living."

A year after her final treatment, Novy-Bennewitz started writing a book – the kind of book she would have grabbed the day after her diagnosis.

Had one existed.

"Diagnosis: Breast Cancer – The Best Plan for Navigating Your Journey" was published in April.

"My dream now is to partner with somebody who can make my book available, free of charge, to newly diagnosed patients," she said.

Maureen Quaid of Lake Forest was diagnosed with breast cancer in early 2007. Her husband, Mike, was out of town when Maureen absorbed the news at a hospital. Mike returned home to Maureen shortly thereafter.

"Right after he opened the door and I saw him, I shook my head," recalls Quaid, 50. "He knew. We hugged and cried. But it wasn't long before I started thinking, 'OK, we'll get through this. We'll plan an attack.'"

On July 21, 2006, Rhoda Markovitz awoke and started to celebrate her ninth "cancer-versary" of receiving her diagnosis of colon cancer. But tough news later that day would shorten the celebration. Markovitz, a lawyer, found out she had breast cancer.

"I count my blessings every day, not just on my 'cancer-versary,'" says the 60-year-old Markovitz, a Northbrook resident and New Trier West High School graduate. "I'm grateful for everything, and I no longer sweat the small stuff. I also learned something about myself since I was diagnosed 15 years ago. I learned I'm stronger than I thought I was."

Dickelle Fonda, 63, is a psychotherapist and a 20-year breast cancer survivor. A gray area, not a lump, was detected at one of her examinations. She was told, "Don't worry. Come back in sixth months."

Her intuition told her something else.

"I got a second opinion," says the Evanston resident and member of the Heartwood Foundation Women & Cancer board of directors. "The second opinion led to a biopsy.

Yes, it was cancer. There's value in my story, and not just because being a 20-year survivor gives patients hope. My cancer was found early because I was persistent."

Katie Clarke, a Wilmette resident, received her diagnosis on May 25, 2011, the weekend before Memorial Day. Her best friend had lost a battle with breast cancer in 2006.

"That was the person I wanted to talk to more than anybody else right after my diagnosis," says the 46-year-old Clarke, who in '07 had participated in a Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer Walk in San Diego in honor of her friend. "I was told by a doctor, on a Friday, 'I do think it's cancer.'"

But her breast cancer wasn't diagnosed definitively until after Memorial Day.

"That weekend was a special one, because my husband (Patrick) and I were extremely focused on each other," recalls Katie, now cancer-free.

Her focus now is on a joint quest, "The Licorice Project," with her sister, Kendra Olvany. It's a nascent social network ([www.thelicoriceproject.com](http://www.thelicoriceproject.com)) for newly diagnosed cancer patients, survivors and the friends and family members who support them. Why licorice? Pieces of it (unexpected treats) were handed out to walkers at that Susan G. Komen event in San Diego.

One of Mimi Moses' friends, recently diagnosed with breast cancer, needed a connection to answer some serious questions, ease some fears. Moses, of Wilmette, was that connection. The 72-year-old underwent her final treatment for breast cancer in 2000.

"I can't believe 12 years have gone by since I was diagnosed," Moses says. "You have to take it in stride, I've always believed. When I found out about my cancer my reaction was, 'Whatever it is, it has to be taken out.' Then I moved on."

Clarke, mother of three, looked back recently. Her life changed after her diagnosis.

In many ways, for the better.

"No one would ever wish this disease on anybody," she says. "But you know what? So many wonderful things have happened to me since I was diagnosed. The love I've received ... the support. And the friends I've made. So many good, new friends."

One of them is Novy-Bennewitz, the one who single-handedly turned a school assembly into a raucous pep rally – at the drop of a wig. ■



"Thanks, Pop, but today's kids don't want money, they want leadership."

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