

People

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The Voice of a Survivor

Joy Allman, a breast cancer survivor, recounts her emotional battle

Joy Allman, of Carrollton, has been through cancer. She's heard the diagnosis, undergone the tests and biopsies and surgeries, the chemotherapy and the radiation. She knows what it's like to fear for her life.

So, when she had the opportunity to share her story with Bikers Battling Breast Cancer Inc.'s "Curves and Chrome" event one July weekend at Villa Rica's V-PLEX, Allman agreed. She'd beat cancer; how hard could this be?

As she took the stage and stood behind the mic, the emotions

came back to her; the fear and the heartache. But her family was on the front row, her children and grandchildren, and by her side was Jane Baker, RN, CBPN-IC – Allman's patient navigator from Tanner Cancer Care, who also had been by her side during her more than six months of treatment.

"I told Jane that I could do this, but she was going to have to stand there beside me," said Allman. "When I first started talking, I started crying, because it's very emotional. But I stopped and told myself that I could do this. I told them about how I'd been diagnosed, and how I'd gone through chemo,

and that I'd had my last radiation treatment last week. And I told them about how the bikers there helped pay for the BRCA testing, and what that meant to me and my family."

BRCA testing is a genetic test for the BRCA1 and BRCA2 gene mutations that have been shown to indicate a greater risk for breast cancer and ovarian cancer. The test, while effective, can also be expensive.

If the test came back positive, it meant that Allman's children and grandchildren – including her two daughters and three granddaughters – were at a much higher risk for developing cancer. Even her son and two grandsons could be at risk, because breast cancer doesn't just occur in women.

Just more than a week removed from finishing treatment, still getting her strength back and looking ahead to life after cancer, Allman had good news to share.

The BRCA tests came back negative. Though breast cancer runs in Allman's family – she also had an older sister who developed the disease in her late 30s – it wasn't something that her children and grandchildren would need to worry about just yet.

"It was a tremendous relief," said Allman.

Allman is one of many breast cancer patients who have been helped through the Bikers Battling Breast Cancer Fund at Tanner Medical Foundation.

Established in 2011, the fund provides assistance with the cost of advanced tests including BRCA testing, stereotactic breast biopsies, breast ultrasounds, CT scans, PET scans and MRI scans. These tests can help physicians deter-



Pam Smith, left, of Dallas, Ga., and Summer Brady of Woodstock, Ga., shop for gear at the Bikers Battling Breast Cancer event.

mine the extent, or stage, of a patient's breast cancer and guide informed decisions about treatment options.

The fund is supported through the annual "Curves & Chrome" event, which rallies the support of the motorcycle community for breast cancer programs. More than \$55,000 has been raised for the Bikers Battling Breast Cancer Fund since its launch two years ago.

"The Bikers Battling Breast Cancer organization, and everyone who supports it, are making a profound and lasting impact on our community," said Kathy Mathis, director of Tanner Medical Foundation.

"Not only our patients, but also their families benefit from the positive effect of this fund. It is a privilege to work with such caring and generous people."



Marah Cuzzort, Debbie Coleman and Tabitha Ketchum, from left, perform songs from the 40s at the Runway for a Reason Fashion Show.

“It’s patients like Joy who make us so proud of what we can accomplish together,” Lisa Herman, president of Bikers Battling Breast Cancer, Inc. “None of this would be possible without the support of the nearly 6,000 community members who have participated in Curves & Chrome. They are the true heroes.”

Allman was diagnosed with breast cancer in early December 2012 when the cancer turned up on her annual screening mammogram at Tanner Breast Health in Carrollton.

“When you hear the word ‘cancer,’ you don’t realize how strong you can be until you don’t have a choice but to be strong,” said Allman. “That is a horrible word to hear.”

Raul Zunzunegui, MD, a board-certified surgeon and breast cancer specialist with Comprehensive Breast Care Center, part of Tanner Medical Group, conducted the biopsy to perform the diagnosis and subsequent surgery. J. Richie Bland, MD, a board-certified radiation oncologist with Tanner Radiation

Oncology, performed the 33 units of radiation treatment that Allman needed at Tanner’s Roy Richards, Sr. Cancer Center, and David Shepard, MD, board-certified in internal medicine, oversaw her chemotherapy at Northwest Georgia Oncology Centers in Carrollton.

“I’m tired, but I’m happy to be alive,” said Allman. “Everyone at Tanner was just wonderful. I’m so grateful for them. Jane was super; she’s just a wonderful person. And I’m so grateful for everyone who helped me through this – my family, the bikers, everybody. I’m so glad we live somewhere that this kind of support is available.”

The lesson Allman hopes people take away from her experience is the value of receiving a screening mammogram every year and following up with any additional testing that’s recommended.

In fact, Allman had only recently learned of a dear friend in another state who found out he had breast cancer. Being male,

he ignored the lump that arose on his chest until the cancer spread, rendering his condition terminal.

“It’s so important to be tested, no matter what,” said Allman. “Do your yearly mammograms and follow-through with the testing. There are such wonderful groups out there, like Bikers Battling Breast Cancer and Tanner Medical Foundation, that will help you pay for your testing. It’s so important that you get that testing, even if it’s just for peace of mind.” **WGL**

Tom Parsons of Team FMX, at right, wows the crowd with his freestyle motocross jumping ability. He and teammate Travis Willis performed jumps of approximately 25 to 30 off ground.

Mitchell Chambers, below, of Paulding County gets his beard painted pink for the cause by McKenna Leapley at the Bikers for Breast Cancer event.

