

WATERTOWN

Teachers Confront Breast Cancer

BY TYLER PICKNER
Watertown Public Opinion

WATERTOWN — There is no common reaction upon hearing the news of a life-threatening illness entering your body.

"I was in shock," said 49-year-old Barb Struwe, wife and mother of two. "I kept thinking it's not that big of a deal."

"It was very scary," said 51-year-old Tammy DeLange, wife and mother of three. "You just feel like, oh my goodness, my life is going to turn upside down."

After receiving the knee-buckling news, each woman prepared to face the harsh diagnosis — breast cancer.

Breast cancer is a malignant tumor that develops in the ducts or lobules of one or both breasts. There are two main categories — non-invasive and invasive — and five stages — zero to four, with four marking the most advanced level. More than 1 in 4 women diagnosed with cancer has breast cancer, according to breastcancer.org.

Struwe's battle against breast cancer — the second deadliest form of cancer for women — began on Jan. 5, 2010, and DeLange's last January.

"I had a hard time when I first found the lump because nothing hurt. I delayed maybe having something done about it because I was a little nervous of what I might find out," said Struwe.

Struwe was diagnosed with a non-invasive form after a series of biopsies, ultrasounds and mammograms. Ten days after her diagnosis, she had a lumpectomy.

The news following Struwe's surgery brought more anguish.

"I thought, OK I can handle this, I just have to have radiation. Then I found out I had to have another surgery and that it was more invasive. I was so disheartened that I had to do the whole regimen of chemotherapy and lose my hair and be sick," she said. "It was also disheartening because every time I was walking into the doctor's office with my battle shields on I was leaving with bad news. That was hard."

Non-invasive cancer was also the diagnosis for DeLange. Following her yearly mammogram in December, doctors called her in for further testing and performed a biopsy.

"It was so small there wasn't even a lump yet," she said. "Because (doctors) didn't know for sure before the biopsy, they said there was a 10 percent chance it was cancer. I assumed I wasn't going to be in that 10 percent, there was no way."

Doctors performed two surgeries



TYLER PICKNER/WATERTOWN PUBLIC OPINION
Barb Struwe works at her desk in her fourth grade classroom at Watertown's Jefferson Elementary following a school day this fall. Struwe battled breast cancer for 10 months in 2010 before entering remission. She remained steadfast at her job during her illness missing few days during chemotherapy treatments.

on DeLange — the first in February and the second in March. DeLange underwent five consecutive weeks of radiation treatment — a high-energy beam to damage the material that causes a cell to divide — Monday through Friday, between March and May.

Both women had surgery and received treatment in Watertown.

A second surgery on Struwe's lymph nodes was needed at the end of January, only two weeks after her lumpectomy. Following the second surgery — accompanied by the insertion of a port-a-cath to assist with chemotherapy — Struwe began a physically demanding chemotherapy process between February and May.

Chemotherapy is a systemic therapy using medicine to weaken and destroy cancer cells in the body through the bloodstream.

"My first four chemotherapy treatments were once a month and they were very hard. I was sick the whole next week," she said.

With the most difficult portion of her chemotherapy treatments behind her, Struwe moved on to a 12-week chemotherapy regimen that lasted throughout the summer of 2010 and was followed by radiation therapy that was completed in October of the same year.

"I kind of did it piece-by-piece. That's the way I had to handle it," said Struwe.

Releasing her handle on everyday activities and letting others in to help was a different sort of struggle for Struwe but one that showed her how much support she had.

"I am an independent person and once you give yourself up from that," Struwe paused. "That's what you have to do. That's probably one of the hardest things to have to do is be in that place of need and know it's OK to be on the receiving end of help."

Help and support came from many directions. Struwe credited her husband, Gregg, for picking up many of the daily duties, and the emotional support from her son and daughter.

"My husband was amazing. I just let Gregg take over everything and watched the world go by," Struwe said.

Struwe's son presented her with a collection of his favorite fleece hats and her daughter painted a collection of 12 rocks — one for each week of chemotherapy — to throw the day after her treatment commemorating her countdown.

The support of her fourth-grade students lifted Struwe's spirits on a daily basis.

"I really like children and I wanted to be around them," she said. "The students were amazing."

After beginning chemotherapy, Struwe's hair began to fall out and she made a decision to be honest with the students.

"I just reached my hands through my hair and showed it to them and said, 'Tomorrow I'll look a little different. I'm having my hair shaved off,'" Struwe said. "The students came around and let me know it would be OK and I'd be the same person. I found that to be really good therapy."

For DeLange, encouragement for her battle initially came from her family.

"My family was so supportive. My husband was so supportive and went to all the appointments with me," DeLange said. "I think my kids wanted to be around me more than they ever had. They all told me they loved me and they showed it."

DeLange didn't share her diagnosis with others right away because she did not want people to feel sorry for her but eventually shared the news and was amazed by the outpouring of support.

"Once I told them, I realized I had more people praying for me," said DeLange. "The support was so overwhelming and so heartwarming to have the people reach out to you."

The amount of good will shown by others left DeLange with the feeling that she never faced her battle alone.

"I felt like I didn't have to turn to anybody because people came to me with cards and letters and phone calls and food," she said. "I just felt like, wow, this community that we live in is unbelievable."

DeLange said Struwe reached out to her following the diagnosis to offer support and answer any questions she may have about the disease.

The disease is not the only thing Struwe and DeLange share. They also share the same cancer stage: remission. They continue to see their physicians on a three-month basis for regular testing but do not receive any treatment for cancer.

Seventy to 80 percent of women diagnosed with breast cancer have no family history of the disease.

"Never miss your mammogram appointment. If I had missed it, the cancer could have kept growing and I could have had more extensive problems," she said.

Struwe suggested women diagnosed with breast cancer seek the help of a specialist to ensure they receive the best information and treatment available.

DeLange and Struwe are among an estimated 2.5 million survivors of breast cancer living in the United States and agreed the best way to face the disease is in a straightforward and positive manner.

"Have a positive outlook on it. Don't let it get you down," advised DeLange.

"I just kind of accepted it and decided to face it head on," said Struwe. "Just concentrate on getting better because celebrating good health is just such a good thing."

Neb. Stepdad To Be Arraigned In Girl's Killing

HARRISON, Neb. (AP) — A western Nebraska man accused of killing his 8-year-old stepdaughter is expected to appear in court this week.

An arraignment for 32-year-old Salvador Lopez, of Mitchell, is scheduled for Tuesday morning in Sioux County District Court.

Lopez is charged with first-degree murder in the death of Kerra Wilson, whose body was found Sept. 22 on remote rangeland several miles north of their home. A Nebraska State Patrol investigator says in court documents that Lopez acknowledged killing his stepdaughter.

Lopez is being held in the Dawes County jail. Court records don't list his attorney.

Police spent two days searching for the girl. Salvador Lopez had said he dropped her off at school but she did not appear in any of the surveillance footage shot in the school or on the playground.

Wall Street Protest Hits Rapid City

RAPID CITY (AP) — More than 50 protesters gathered in Rapid City on Saturday to support the Occupy Wall Street movement.

The group gathered around Main Street Square and throughout downtown Rapid City, waving signs at passing cars.

The *Rapid City Journal* reports that unlike rallies in New York, the local protest did not attempt to campout. The crowd instead dispersed at the day went on.

Rally participants had an array of issues, but a common theme was anger at big banks and the richest 1 percent of the population.

Another commonly cited grievance was student debt for college. A similar protest event was scheduled to take place in Vermillion Saturday.

Daugaard: Landowners Fighting Pine Beetles

PIERRE (AP) — Gov. Dennis Daugaard says landowners in the Black Hills are showing a strong interest in fighting the region's widespread infestation of mountain pine beetles.

The South Dakota governor unveiled an initiative to fight pine beetles in August, and the state Agriculture Department is now helping landowners with identification and eradication efforts.

Daugaard says about 1,900 landowners have signed up more than 95,000 acres of private land to be surveyed to identify trees infested with the beetles that kill trees. Infested trees will be marked for removal.

The new initiative will provide an additional \$1 million in state funding a year for the next three years in an effort to control the spread of the beetles.

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Neb. Concealed-Carry Apps Below Prediction

OMAHA, Neb. (AP) — Permit applications under Nebraska's 5-year-old concealed-carry law have been far below the number predicted by the state patrol in the measure's first year of implementation.

The law that went into effect in January 2007 allows residents to carry concealed guns after taking safety courses and obtaining permits. Such permits are good for five years.

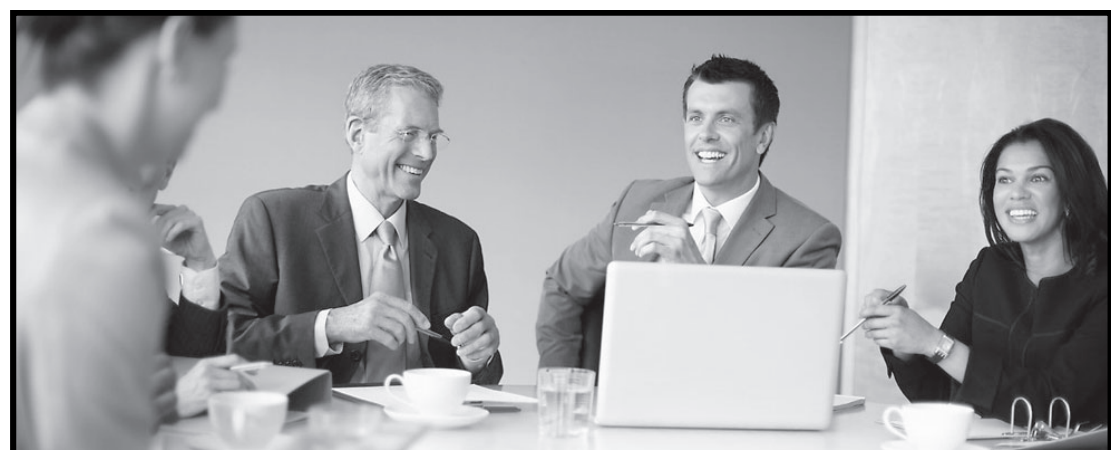
Lt. John Shelton, who oversees the patrol division that reviews permits, said the number of active permits was 15,432, as of Wednesday. That's equal to the number the patrol has issued since the law went into effect and more than 4,000 shy of the number the patrol said it expected to issue in the first year. A total of 189 permits have been denied, Shelton said.

The patrol had predicted about 19,500 people would apply in 2007,

with 5,000 additional applicants in each subsequent year.

"Those numbers never really manifested themselves," Shelton told the *Lincoln Journal Star*.

Other than anecdotal evidence from law enforcement officials, there's no way of knowing the law's effects on public safety. There is no statewide database of incidents involving people with permits for concealed weapons.



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