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COURTESY PHOTO
Doris Esparza, left, is seen here with her son, Hector Jr., and Christy Jensen, RT, after radiation treatment at the Avera Sacred Heart Cancer Center in Yankton. Esparza will complete her radiation treatments this week and hopes it completely rids her of breast cancer.

Fighting Cancer, Woman Knows The Value Of Positive Outlook

BY NATHAN JOHNSON
nathan.johnson@yankton.net

WAGNER — It started with a mysterious lump in her armpit.

Within months, what Doris Esparza thought was an annoyance would turn out to be a threat to her life. At age 25, the Wagner woman was diagnosed with stage 4 breast cancer.

“The first time they told me, ‘You have cancer,’ I shed a few tears and then calmed down. I said, ‘What do we do?’” Esparza recalled. “When I was later told it was stage 4, I again had that moment of sadness. I said, ‘This is bad. Stage 4 is the last stage.’” However, she never allowed the disease to overwhelm her. “Every doctor and other person that I would tell I had cancer would ask me, ‘How can you be so calm telling me you have cancer?’” Esparza said. “I have a really good support system. I have my parents, my brothers and sisters. I had to be strong for them, my kids and my husband. I would think to myself, ‘If I break down, they will break down, so I have to be strong.’”

DORIS ESPARZA

Esparza expects to undergo her final radiation treatment this week, and she said things are looking good.

However, it has been a long journey for the young mother of two children.

It was September 2012 when Esparza first asked her OB/GYN about a lump in her armpit. The doctor thought it was probably a clogged milk duct since Esparza was breastfeeding, so she prescribed an antibiotic.

“It was in January where I thought, ‘I’m

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A Clear Look At Cancer



COURTESY PHOTO
Shown is the Yankton Medical Clinic's (YMC) breast MRI machine, which is used for both breast cancer screening and treatment evaluation following a diagnosis. Pictured are YMC MRI staff members (from left) Will Eidsness, MD, Board Certified Radiologist; Tricia Prouty, RTR(M)(CT)(MR); Allene Sommer, RTR(M)(CT)(MR); and Jean Degroot, RTR(M)(CT)(MR), MRI/CT Team Leader.

In Cancer Fight, Yankton Native Gets Support Of Minn. Guard

BY ROB NIELSEN
rob.nielsen@yankton.net

When the Minnesota Army National Guard asked Yankton native Sgt. Cassie Mecuk to be a part of the launch of the Pink Tank Project, she was more than happy to oblige.

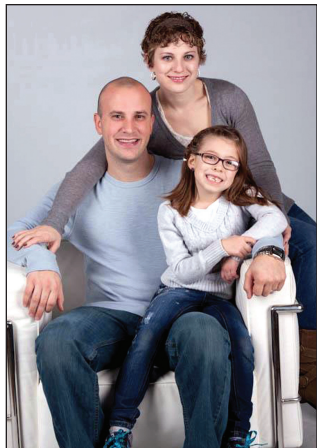
“I jumped on board with it because it is just such a cool initiative that the Guard is doing,” Mecuk said. “It links me to my brothers and sisters through the one thing that makes me different than them.”

Mecuk is the granddaughter of current Yankton resident Ruth Heatherly.

That difference is the fact that Mecuk, 28, has been diagnosed with breast cancer for the third time in four years and is currently undergoing chemotherapy. This time, she said the disease is spreading.

“As grim as it sounds, we celebrate when it shows the chemo is diminishing tumors and prepare for spreading and

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COURTESY PHOTO
Cassie Mecuk, a native of Yankton, is shown with her husband Mike and their daughter Mahlia.

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Dressing For Battle

Store Chain Owner Set To Make Good On Challenge

BY RANDY DOCKENDORF
randy.dockendorf@yankton.net

WAGNER — RF Buche is learning that Breast Cancer Awareness Month can be a real drag.

The month was barely half finished, and the Wagner businessman realized he would likely be wearing a dress as part of a cancer fundraiser. Life-size cutout displays even show what he looks like in drag — complete with his goatee.

Buche Foods operates 10 grocery and convenience stores in seven South Dakota communities. This month, the stores are selling cases of bottled water for \$5, with all proceeds benefiting area cancer patients.

“I pledged, if we saw a 25 percent increase in the cases (of water) sold compared to last year, I would wear a dress while carrying out groceries at each of our stores for half a day,” he said. “I am looking at wearing the dress in November, when we celebrate our 108th anniversary as Buche Foods.”

The promotion is held during Breast Cancer Awareness Month because of the event's high visibility and support. However, Buche emphasized his stores' assistance isn't limited to breast cancer and can benefit any cancer patient.

In fact, the stores already disburse

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Pink Ladies' Idea Hits A Bullseye

BY NATHAN JOHNSON
nathan.johnson@yankton.net

A group of dart players wanting to help cancer patients in Yankton have seen their idea spread across the state and into Nebraska during the past three years.

The growing popularity of the concept culminated last weekend in the first state Pink Lady Dart Tournament, which was held in Sioux Falls.

“I was so proud of how much Pink Ladies has grown,” Pam Cunningham, one of the founding members of the Yankton league, said of the tournament. “It was awesome to see survivors and

hear their stories.”

She noted that her 38-year-old cousin was recently diagnosed with breast cancer.

“It was very powerful for me to go and shoot for that cause in honor of her,” Cunningham stated.

The Pink Ladies formed in Yankton in 2011. Cunningham and fellow dart player Kerry Hetzel decided to create a new league with TNT Enterprises dart league coordinator Randy Oliver that would raise money to help those with breast cancer. However, the mission has expanded to assist Yankton residents dealing with any type of cancer.

“I think people think that, because

we're the Pink Ladies, this is just about breast cancer,” Cunningham said. “But it's all forms of cancer and the men, women and children who have it. People can contact us if they know someone in the community or if they are personally fighting cancer and need financial assistance. We want to make a little bit of a difference for them while they are fighting the fight of their life.”

Cunningham said the Yankton group has raised approximately \$17,000 during its existence.

Now, Pink Lady Dart Leagues can be

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RANDY DOCKENDORF/P&D
The Pink Ladies Dart League present a donation to Yankton cancer patient Larry Wardell (front, center) during Sunday's short presentation at the Happy Hourz bar. Larry is joined in the front row by family members (from left) Tyler Conklin, Bonnie Wardell, Chris Conklin holding Ava Johnson, Alexis Johnson holding Ryker Johnson and Brandon Johnson. Bonnie Wardell and Chris Conklin are both cancer survivors, Bonnie for 20 years and Chris for two years.