



PERSONAL STORIES FROM THE HOPE CHEST

Breast Cancer Survivor Finds a Home for Volunteer Efforts

Two years ago, Barbara Zwak was recovering from a double mastectomy, the operation that removed her breast cancer and began her march to survival. In November 2003, she and her doctor declared victory and another journey started, but this time to support women experiencing similar pain. As the director of marketing and store development for the Chico's Minnesota franchises, Zwak engaged the franchise's owner, Danna Atherton, to get Chico's involved in the Hope Chest for Breast Cancer. Atherton had learned of the Hope Chest through a friend who is a breast cancer survivor. To date, Chico's has contributed thousands of dollars of merchandise to the Hope Chest Retail Shop.

After meeting Barbara Hensley, Zwak knew she had found a home for her volunteer efforts and started volunteering at the store to help appraise clothes. "Barbara has this warm ability to communicate and make everyone involved understand that their contributions are extraordinary," Zwak explained. "Not to mention, she has an incredible head for business and the great support of her family...It feels wonderful to be part of a foundation that focuses on helping where the need is greatest and provides such peace of mind and inspiration for those who contribute."

Miracles Abound with Hope Chest Supporters

At only 28, Linda Horn started to experience paraneoplastic, a syndrome that affects the central nervous system. Her skin itched, she'd fall in the shower. But no one seemed to know what was wrong. The neurologist thought she had multiple sclerosis; another thought she was crazy. But the neurologist on call at the Mayo Clinic the day she went to the ER suspected something different: breast cancer. Dr. Steven Vernino had just read a study that showed that in less than 1 percent of cancer cases, paraneoplastic can occur. At 28, the other doctors hadn't even thought to give her a mammogram. Had they, the doctors would have discovered stage IV breast cancer with a terrible prognosis. Luckily for Linda, the cancer hadn't spread and she reacted well to the chemo and radiation. But the cancer treatment did have another side effect: early-onset menopause. Through the treatment process, doctors tested Linda and sure enough she had all the signs of menopause. So, when she got pregnant a year later, her doctors were in shock. Now the mother of a healthy, two-year-old son and breast cancer survivor, Linda Horn lends her support to the Hope Chest. Linda's GMAC-RFC colleagues celebrated her survival and miracle baby at a party at the Hope Chest Retail Store.