

# PINK

*on Parade*

BY BLAIR CHEEK MOORE • PHOTOGRAPHY BY ROBERT MILLER

With the addition of the website BreastCancerTV.net to its programs and services for Central Alabama, Montgomery's Joy to Life Foundation is using technology to march ever forward in the battle against breast cancer.

When Joy Blondheim was diagnosed with breast cancer 12 years ago, she and her husband Dickie knew little about the disease they were facing. Now, nothing could be further from the truth. Not only have they fought and won the battle against Joy's cancer, they are doing all they can to help others to learn about it and detect it early, when it's most treatable.

The foundation they created, Joy to Life, is now one of the most successful breast cancer screening programs in the state, having offered more than 2,000 mammograms to medically underserved women in the area. "At least 11 women have been diagnosed and treated successfully," said Dickie.

They've quickly expanded from three to 28 counties, largely because of the new car tag issued by the state of Alabama. They needed 1,000 people to participate in order to print the tags, but the community overwhelmed them wonderfully, buying almost 1,400. "It's funny to me though because we were just so grateful for my recovery at first. We started out saying we've got to do something to give back, and it's amazing to us how much our little foundation has done since we started. The way people have stepped up to help us has just been unbelievable," Joy said.

"There are single mothers out there who have to work two jobs to keep their kids in school—who will neglect themselves to take the best care they can of their children. They need our help," Dickie said. "We think it's important to help as many people as we can."

Joy to Life's newest project, BreastCancerTV.net went online at the end of March and is a website packed with inspiration and information for those facing this frightening diagnosis. One of the main things those that log on to the site will find is hope. "It started to come about last year at our annual walk in April," said Dickie. They set up a "My Story" tent where people could share personal experiences of surviving breast cancer on camera. They expected just three or four participants but ended up with 25. "Our son, Brad, who produces documentaries in California, came up with the idea," said Dickie.

About two years ago, Dickie asked Brad for advice on how to create a larger web presence for Joy to Life. He remembers how they discussed the emerging You Tube and Facebook culture and how these aspects could be applied to Joy to Life. "We began to think of ways we could visualize a lot of the information people would want to look for



when trying to learn about breast cancer,” Brad said. “We created Breast Cancer TV as an internet network whose content is all things breast cancer.” Its goal is to deliver information about this sensitive topic in a powerful, effective and engaging way.

In addition to being able to help his mother and father in their passionate endeavor to educate people about breast cancer, Brad has been struck by the spirit of the breast cancer community and the motivation behind sharing their stories. “The breast cancer community is so dedicated to helping each other,” he said. “I was really touched by the way they wanted to be a source of help for others.”

Nancy and Tommy Fields of Big Dreamz Creative have been involved in bringing BreastCancerTV.net to life from the start. As they reviewed the footage taken from the “My Story” tent, it became clear to them and the Blondheims that these terrific, moving stories would touch the lives of others facing breast cancer. “We started by shooting the Public Service Announcement for the first Walk of Life and have been working with Joy to Life ever since,” said Tommy. Big Dreamz provides a variety of services for the foundation including video production, photography and web design and development. “The Blondheims have a wonderful way of inspiring all of us that work with the Joy to Life Foundation,” he said.

The Fields have watched the foundation’s Walk of Life grow from 250 walkers in the first year to over 3,000 in 2008. At the same time, the amount of money raised has grown substantially, with all of it staying in our area to provide mammograms to women in our state who need but can’t afford them.

The decision to leap into the web community with this dynamic tool is no small thing. “It’s a big step and one that is filling a need and getting critical facts along with inspirational stories to those involved in the fight against breast cancer,” Tommy said.

Soon they will be shooting educational pieces with local doctors along with segments about post-treatment make-up, yoga for survivors and much more. “We want to inform, educate and inspire with this site,” Tommy said. “Inform by giving people facts they don’t have and opening their eyes to what’s available to them, educate by showing them what they can do to better their situation and what they can do to help themselves feel better, and inspire them by showing them that they are not alone in their fight.”

Tommy sees developing BreastCancerTV.net as creating an oasis that those dealing with the disease, as well as their friends and family members, can go to and get what they need to make their lives better. “It’s also been amazing how people have jumped on board and come to us with a wealth of ideas,” he said. “It’s great to see the community come together for the cause.”

BreastCancerTV.net is also full of rich educational information on topics most people don’t ever hear about until they are diagnosed. One of those subjects is lymphodema, a potentially dangerous condition that often accompanies breast cancer because of the way it affects lymph nodes. “It’s one of those things you don’t ever hear about that is a terrible problem,” Dickie said. Joy had to have 18 lymph nodes removed totally during her treatment. Because lymph nodes are used for drainage, without them, an arm can swell to twice its normal size. There

are techniques to wrap and massage the arm to keep this from occurring, which are explained on the site.

BreastCancerTV.net also has a video detailing how to do a self breast exam. The most common teaching tool for self exams right now is a hand-out card with instructions, but an interactive tool like this video leaves less room for guesswork. “We thought it would be better to have a doctor explain how to do it,” Dickie said. “I know a lot of people learn better from videos—I do,” he said.

But the thing everyone is most excited about are the stories from survivors and their families. “In some of the simplest ways, the stories are the most powerful thing,” Joy said. “It allows people who have been diagnosed to see what other women have been through,” Dickie said.

“I know when I was diagnosed with breast cancer, what was most helpful to me—although I had all the support in the world from family and friends—was talking with other survivors and hearing stories of other people who were surviving,” Joy remembered. “It just did something to my emotions to make me believe that ‘Yeah, I really do have a chance.’ I’d talk to perfect strangers and feel instantly connected with them. I just know how helpful these stories are going to be—whether from survivors, their kids or their spouses.”

At this year’s Walk of Life on April 18, they are again going to have a “My Story” tent, but this time they are also inviting spouses and children. “Breast cancer doesn’t just affect the women. It changes the lives of everyone in that family,” Dickie said.

“If there’s anything I want people to know it’s that we always appreciate their support,” Joy said. “We never take one donation, one volunteer, or one person behind us for granted. We know we could not have done this without them, and we could never thank them enough.” ❧

## BETHERE

The eighth Annual Walk of Life (5K Run/Walk & Kid’s Dash) benefiting the Joy to Life Foundation takes place Saturday, April 18. The starting point and finish line is Cramton Bowl in downtown Montgomery. There will be cash prizes and post-race activities. Registration begins at 7 a.m. Run/Walk begins at 8:30 a.m. Kids Dash (for children 10 and under) begins at 9:45 a.m. The adult pre-registration fee is \$25 and the race day registration is \$30. Pre-registration for ages 11-14 is \$10 and the race day registration \$15. Ages 10 and under are free. Teams must have a minimum of 10 members and there are special team rates available. For more information visit [www.joytolife.org](http://www.joytolife.org) or call 334.284.LIFE (5433).