

One man's mission against cancer

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How it all started

I will never forget that night. The idea came to me in a flash. In December 1995 I was stamping holiday cards and preparing for a lecture on the history of breast cancer surgery, when suddenly it occurred to me: Why not have a stamp to raise money for breast cancer research? The next thing I knew, I had become a cancer activist.

I have taken care of almost 3,000 women with breast cancer, and I have seen every day how this dreadful disease affects them and their husbands, families, and children. The devastation of the disease wore on me every day. I decided I could treat these women for the rest of my life, or I could help eradicate the disease. I chose to act—immediately.

I first contacted the U.S. Postmaster General with the idea for the stamp and was promptly turned down. Then I wrote letters to all the female members of Congress, with no response. Incensed, I flew to Washington, DC, and started knocking on the doors of Capitol Hill lawmakers. I essentially became a full-time lobbyist while continuing a full-time breast surgical practice. It was exhausting, but I firmly believed that my efforts and hard work would pay off. Americans are very philanthropic, so I knew that all I had to do was to get legislation passed and the money would start being raised. Not an easy task, as I was soon to learn.

After two long years and a dozen trips back and forth across the country, my persistence paid off in 1997. Introduced into

the U.S. Senate by Sen. Dianne Feinstein (D-CA), the Stamp Out Breast Cancer Act authorized the Postal Service to establish and sell this special stamp—known as a semipostal—for two years to raise money for breast cancer research. The stamp became the first in the nation's history dedicated to raising funds for a special cause and has become the second highest selling stamp in postal service history.

The legislation was reauthorized and signed into law by President Clinton in July 2000 for an additional two years. This action will allow the program to again allow a surcharge of up to 25 percent above the value of a first-class stamp (the stamps sell for 40 cents), with the surplus revenues going to breast cancer research. The measure also includes a provision preventing the deduction of money raised from the sale of the stamps from other federal funds that a research institute receives. To date, more than \$20 million has been raised for breast cancer research from the sale of the stamps.

Still more to accomplish

In 1998, I founded a not-for-profit organization—Cure Breast Cancer, Inc.—to promote the stamp and to continue to raise money for breast cancer research. Each year in California, more than 1,000 women and men who cannot afford treatment are diagnosed with breast cancer. Early detection of breast cancer is the best protection. However, there is no benefit of early detection if adequate treatment cannot be obtained.

Last October, President Clinton signed the Breast and Cervical Cancer Prevention and Treatment Act of 2000. This law will provide treatment for low-income women who have been diagnosed with breast or cervical cancer. The measure will allow states to expand their Medicaid programs to cover costs by providing states with federal matching funds at no less than 65 percent.

In addition to the action taken in Washington, DC., a measure was passed by the California legislature on October 15, 2000, to create a breast cancer license plate to raise money for uninsured and underinsured women who need treatment. The Breast Cancer Treatment License Plate will be issued by the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) for vehicles registered in the state of California. The plate features the image of the Pink



The stamp depicts Diana, the huntress and goddess of fertility, reaching behind her head to pull an arrow from her quiver to fend off an enemy, in this case, breast cancer. The image reflects the same position that a woman assumes for a breast self-exam and mammography.

Ribbon and the Breast Cancer Research Postal Stamp. Together they symbolize hope for treatment and a cure. The plates cost \$50, with \$34 going into the treatment fund. Fees are tax-deductible. After the DMV's administrative costs are met, a small percentage will go toward the California Environmental License Plate Fund (for personalized plates), and the majority will go to the Breast Cancer Treatment Fund. Funds will be distributed through grants to health care providers offering treatment to uninsured and underinsured patients. Cure Breast Cancer, Inc., must collect 7,500 paid applications by December 31, 2001, before the DMV will authorize the production of the plates.

A new fight

In June of last year, I was diagnosed with prostate cancer. But as most people who know me understood, this would not set me back. Instead, I'm using my diagnosis to encourage men and women to have regular cancer screenings. My job is to save



The prototype breast cancer license plate.

lives, and I believe that taking this experience and sharing it with others will save lives.


While breast cancer has emerged from the shadows, prostate cancer remains more shrouded—despite the fact an estimated 180,000 new prostate cancer cases will be diagnosed this year and nearly 32,000 men will die of the disease, according to the American Cancer Society. The numbers, particularly of new cases, closely mirror those for breast cancer.

So my new message is this: “*Screen Together—Live Together.*” I have started a national campaign for women to take their husbands and boyfriends to get screened for prostate cancer when they go for their annual mammograms. Early detection is crucial for surviving both diseases.

I was very excited to hear that last October the Prostate Cancer Research and Protection Act was signed by President Clinton. This legislation will expand the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s authority to provide grants to state and local health departments to conduct screening programs to detect prostate cancer.

In August of 2000 I underwent brachytherapy (seed implantation) for my cancer. I would like to take this opportunity to say how grateful I am to

my physicians and the community for their unwavering help and support.

I never use the term “cancer survivor.” That implies that once you’re healed, the fight is over. But cancer affects your life so deeply, it’s never over. It won’t be over until the day that not one person gets cancer ever again. 

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