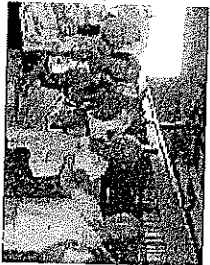


Photo C Powers



cancer survivors themselves, so it's very inspirational. One of our facilitators is a 37-radiation-treatment breast cancer survivor who now does triathlons.

"Everyone is a volunteer and everything is donated, from food to massages by the licensed massage therapist, Louise Leguizamon, to

Gina Salatin's extra horses. Flat Branch Foxhounds has completely embraced these retreats, and many of the women members of the hunt come to volunteer. They organize the Sunday barbecue. They run to town to pick up lunches donated by the Stouplight Deli so that the ladies have them waiting after they ride. The response from the Aiken community has truly been amazing.

"Tina McCarthy and chef Miles of the Willhook gave us a beautiful poolside dinner at the hotel one evening. As I was thanking Miles at the end of the dinner, he took off his apron and rushed out to visit his sister in the hospital. She'd just had breast cancer-related surgery. It struck me how close this disease can be to any of us. Maybe that's why so many of the women who attend a retreat come back to volunteer. They become passionate about keeping the organization going strong."

WBC is constantly contacting hospitals and Wellness Communities like the Gilde (Radnor) Houses to spread the word to their patients. In order to draw from the local community, Chris attends cancer support groups at Aiken Regional Hospital, and has also become involved with the Savannah River Cancer Foundation. In fact, two women from the SRCP will be attending this April's retreat.

The patients themselves also help create the buzz. As Chris tells it: "Two doctors from Mt. Sinai hospital in Miami Beach signed on to attend a retreat personally in May. Their patients told them how these retreats changed their lives. Now they want to experience what we do

first-hand. Imagine how powerful it will be for these patients to go on a mini-vacation with their doctors. To be with them - not in the sterile, frightening atmosphere of a hospital, but in the beautiful woods of Aiken, surrounded by horses, dogs and nature."

"The more women find out about it, the more retreats I'll offer," Chris says. "I'm more than willing to do as many retreats as I can, probably six to eight a year. It doesn't matter if you're newly diagnosed, or 20 years out. If you feel you need to get away you can just come. It doesn't cost a penny."

Chris has instituted a last-day ritual where each group of women who attend a retreat designs and creates a "garden of hope" under a huge oak tree. Annets from Cold Creek Nursery helps Chris select plants that will thrive in their new environment. Nevertheless, that final day must be difficult for everyone.

"When the weekend is over you say to yourself, 'That was such a beautiful thing.'" Chris admits. "But watching the ladies run and wave from the back window as the cars drive away is still gut-wrenching."

By the way, did I mention that Chris has had five surgeries for skin cancer herself? No matter. As she puts it, "I don't really think about it much." She and her equine friends are much too busy making a difference in some other people's lives. *HP*

Edgar Carol Flat Branch Hounds will host a Women Beyond Cancer Benefit Trail Ride on April 13th (rain date April 20th). Support this worthy cause. For more information, contact Chris Powers, Two Sisters Farm, 803-646-0123. Visit www.womenbeyondcancer.org to find out more about the organization.



Photo C. Powers



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