

CHAT ROOM



BARB CRISP

She took the pledge, urges others to do so

Take the pledge Community Challenge '97. Healthy people, healthy Oakland. These were just words being heard around the Farmington Community School last May.

Then Phyllis Howard, our preschool director, in her commitment to do what is best for her staff, brought in Mandi Skeegan, community relations director from the Farmington branch of the YMCA, to explain how we could each benefit from being a participant in this program.

This program developed because the YMCA did some research and found our little area of the community to be extremely lacking, for the most part, in healthy lifestyles. By getting a grant to work with the community, the Y felt it could greatly impact our lives.

Being the competitive, compulsive person that I am, I decided at the meeting to "Take the Pledge" and I convinced most of my family to join me. This was such a great opportunity for each of us to get a YMCA membership for June through September and take some classes.

Instead of complaining about the shape I was in, I was being given the opportunity "on a silver platter" to do something about it. It was my intent

Please See CHAT ROOM, B2

Living life to fullest after cancer

■ Life after a double mastectomy and reconstructive surgery has been rich for this Farmington Hills librarian.



BY MARY RODRIGUE
STAFF WRITER

Linda Bennett wants women to know that there is life after breast cancer.

The adult services librarian for the Farmington Community Library is back to work full time, planning a European fall vacation, and enjoying life to the fullest after a double mastectomy and reconstructive surgery in the past year.

"I refer to this whole thing as a big inconvenience," said Bennett, who sports a new short blond hairstyle. Chemotherapy caused her shoulder-length locks to fall out completely. She wore head scarves and a wig until her new hair grew in.

"I'd never been sick before, just the routine things. I've been exceedingly fortunate all my life.

"I walk, I'm a wannabe runner. I ride my bike," said Bennett, a divorcee with two adult children and three grandchildren.

Although she has resumed her active lifestyle, some things are still on hold.

"I was just starting to rollerblade when I had the surgery. I haven't tried that yet. And no more ice skating. I was taking lessons. I don't want to fall and break my chest."

The downtown Farmington resident discovered a lump in her breast during a self exam last summer. She thought it was a harmless fibroid tumor.

"I drink a lot of coffee," said Bennett, referring to one theory that says caffeine causes fibroid tumors.

The discovery coincided with her annual physical examination. Her doctor confirmed the suspicious mass and a lumpectomy was scheduled. She had to scrap a trip to London, England,



STAFF PHOTO BY BRIAN MITCHELL

On the job: Linda Bennett pores over data at the Farmington Hills library, where she is an adult services librarian. A voracious reader, she researched reconstructive surgery options following her double mastectomy.

with ticket already in hand.

On one level, the prognosis - cancer - was a shock, but as the daughter and granddaughter of breast cancer victims, she wasn't totally surprised.

"My grandma was in her 70s when she was diagnosed; my mom in her 60s," said Bennett, who describes her age as "50-ish."

"I was told by my doctors, co-workers and friends that I have a stupendous attitude. So did my grandmother, who had radical surgery."

Bennett's co-workers attest to her

attitude.

"If the power of positive thinking works, Linda is the prime example," said Maureen Baugh, an adult services librarian who has known Bennett since 1984.

"Sometimes I wondered how she could keep up such a strong front."

Added Annette Weiss, another librarian who works with Bennett: "I've known her for some time, I like her. She's a real trooper."

While still in recovery from her lumpectomy, Bennett's doctor told her

that a double mastectomy was necessary.

"The odds are one out of nine that a woman will get breast cancer," she said. "And statistically, breast cancer is hitting younger and younger women. My reaction was one out of nine, why not me? That's what I clearly remember thinking."

Her doctor, Deborah Sims, a Farmington Hills general surgeon and specialist in diseases of the breast, had her complete trust from the beginning.

Please see AFTER CANCER, B2



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