

Gilda from pageA5

club location in the United States. The first Gilda's Club was founded in New York in 1993 by Gene Wilder, widower of Gilda Radner, her therapist Joanna Bull and lots of Gilda's friends.

Eight area women, whose lives had all been touched by cancer, founded the local club. The structure is a former farmhouse built in 1913. It was purchased by the club on Radner's 50th birthday in June 1996. Club founders and many volunteers from the community spent 18 months renovating it before its grand opening.

"This whole thing has been community driven, community supported and is community directed," said Suzanne Aberly, public relations coordinator for Gilda's Club. "And while there is certainly a serious side to Gilda's Club, because there are so many types of cancer, a visit can be a lot of fun too. There's singing, art projects, meditation and lots of support group meetings."

Another misconception of the club is the idea that it's been created just for women with ovarian cancer. In fact, it welcomes men, women and children with the disease plus all of their family members and friends.

"We need to dispel the myth that this is only for women because we're not — we are here to service everybody," Aberly said. "We provide family and friends with social and emotional support because this impacts everyone. I think we really provide that sense of community where people share their wisdom and express how to deal with the illness."

"When I used to go to group at the same place where I got my medical treatments, it was awful because you don't want to have to go back there. This is a very comfortable home-like setting ... There's really something for everyone."

Kristina Nagy
Gilda's Club member

Nagy, 35, who was diagnosed with breast cancer two years ago can attest to the endless positive aspects of Gilda's Club. A young, single parent of a then 12-year-old son, Nagy found a small lump about the size of a marble in her breast.

When a mammogram came back normal and an ultra sound depicted the growth to be a cyst Nagy was told not to worry about it and she went about her life. In less than two months when the mass went from a marble to the size of a lemon, Nagy returned to the doctor, quickly visited a surgeon and was diagnosed with breast cancer.

"I had an extremely large tumor but was very lucky because only one of my lymph nodes was positive for cancer," Nagy recalled. "I was in stage three, though, so they started a very aggressive form of chemotherapy that shrank the tumor to almost nothing."

After that, Nagy had a mastectomy, a lymph node removed and 40 radiation treatments over the next year. During her treatment, Nagy attended a support group at Providence Hospital. The leader of that group, Kathleen Hardy, became the program director at Gilda's,

prompting Nagy to join the club.

"I've been able to stay positive and fight because of Kathleen," she said. "And she doesn't just tell you what you want to hear. She's sincere, honest and very supportive."

The idea of having people meet to share their strength and support in a cozy setting is also a big plus at Gilda's, according to Nagy. There's a sitting area, a kitchen, a basement full of toys for kids and final work is being completed in what will be known as "Gilda's Gardens" behind the house.

"When I used to go to group at the same place where I got my medical treatments, it was awful because you don't want to have to go back there," she said. "This is a very comfortable home-like setting and there are all kinds of different groups that meet there. There's really something for everyone."

Noting that her mother also attended support group meetings at the hospital with her, Nagy found it difficult at times because sitting side by side they were both emotional about different aspects of her diagnosis.

"The thing I like about Gilda's is that

there's separate things for everyone," she said. "At Gilda's, I can have my own group and Mom can have hers. And my son is even going to go to a meeting that's coming up for teens."

Today, Nagy has logged 12 months since her last chemotherapy treatment and is in remission. She is enjoying new hair growth, which allowed her to get rid of the wig she wore religiously throughout her ordeal.

"I had hair that was down to my waist so the hardest part of the treatment for me was losing it and dealing with wearing a wig," she said. "Besides the treatments the worst part of this was feeling like I might leave my son behind. I didn't worry about me, because I know where I'm going. But the thought of leaving him was terrifying."

Not one to dwell on the past, Nagy is now a very active volunteer for Gilda's Club and recently returned to work.

"I live my life with the end in mind because I always know that this can return. But I don't let it run my life," Nagy said. "I just realize it and go on."

The next fund raiser for Gilda's Club will be "Gilda meet Godzilla" at 6 p.m. May 20 at the Star Theater in Southfield. Tickets are \$25 or for patrons \$100. There will be fun and food before the 7:30 showing.

For tickets, send a check to Gilda's Club Metro Detroit, 3517 Rochester Road, Royal Oak. Gilda's Club has non-profit status and is funded through individual donations, special events and sponsorships.

Love Begins at Thirty



Shirley Bavonese, A.C.S.W.

Are you a woman over thirty looking for a satisfying love relationship? Help is available! Shirley Bavonese, A.C.S.W., Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist, practicing psychotherapist for over 13 years, specializes in helping women over thirty attract, develop and maintain fulfilling, healthy intimate romantic relationships. The Co-Director of the Relationship Institute in Royal Oak, Shirley has a fantastic track record in helping women

break out of old unhealthy dating patterns and learn how to create passionate, harmonious relationships. A bright, enthusiastic, spontaneous woman with a great sense of humor, Shirley blends equal bits of wit and wisdom in her work. She loves working with women who are serious about creating a lifelong loving relationship, and are ready and willing to make changes in how they approach dating and intimacy.

According to Shirley, "The best divorce prevention available is wise, skillful dating. Women especially need to learn to make careful, thoughtful decisions about dating. What you see is what you get, and I help women be absolutely clear about what they want and what they're getting in a man." Shirley evaluates the most appropriate level of service and then works with women in psychotherapy or in Relationship Coaching, which can be done over the phone. She helps her clients develop an unique personalized dating plan, and then supports, encourages and compassionately cajoles them into following through with it. Shirley has helped numerous women find healthy committed men to date and then skillfully guided them through the path to marriage and beyond.

A happily married mother of three, Shirley also helps women deal with the tricky balance between family and work in the '90s. To set up an appointment or for more information, call (248) 546-0407 and speak with Shirley personally.

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