

'Reach to Recovery' founder visits county

By LORRAINE McCLISH
Each year Terese Lasser travels an estimated 150,000 miles to talk about Reach to Recovery. This week she is in Oakland County, bringing up-to-date information on cancer research, talking to and training volunteers and meeting women who have had mastectomies, breast removals.

Mrs. Lasser is the founder of Reach to Recovery, an optimistic, compassionate rehabilitation program for the woman who has had a breast removed.

The program is 22 years old now, stemming from the aftermath of Mrs. Lasser's own surgery. It has reached tens of thousands of women. It is international in scope, and last year in this country alone, about 8,500 volunteers

visited about 50,000 patients, erasing what she calls "a hidden scar." Reach to Recovery works on a woman-to-woman, one-to-one basis "answering questions that need to be answered," Mrs. Lasser said. Of her own post-surgical experience, she said, "My doctor either wasn't talking or didn't know what I was talking about. The nurse knew less than I did."

"I UNDOUBTEDLY knew other women who had this surgery, but I didn't know who they were because they weren't talking either. Remember, this was more than 30 years ago and all of this was very hush-hush at that time."

After some time spent "mulling and grousing around," she formulated Reach to Recovery. "Reach" was a very important word to her.

"I was reaching down to find the Lord again and I was physically attempting to reach up my arms," she said, "and meanwhile I was discovering that there were more important things in life than being a golf champion. I didn't have to spend all those hours on the tee."

Reach to Recovery became a full-time job for her after that. She and her program have since become affiliated with the American Cancer Society and she has used the name as the title of her latest book.

She stresses that volunteers do "not go off wily nily" but rather are highly trained for their hospital visits with stringent rules relating to the surgeon's okay, timed visits that won't tire the patient and conversation that won't deviate from the point.

Even a gift bag that is left for the patient may only contain items that adhere to the code she's laid down. The ones that are distributed now carry her manual, other literature for the families, temporary breast forms, temporary bras and a ball and rope, exercise equipment to regain complete use of the arm as fast as possible.

MRS. LASSER is a 51-a-year volunteer who has written "every piece of literature there is on the subject" and has had her manual (for both patient and volunteer)



TERESE LASSER

translated into 11 languages and Braille. Her literature includes information useful to the husband of the mastectomee (and there are some husband-to-husband volunteers in the program) plus a letter to the son and a letter to the daughter of the new patient.

Mrs. Lasser is adamant about stressing the positive and she does this in many ways. When she talks about self breast examinations she says, "If you find anything suspicious, don't panic, more than 65 percent of them are good lumps, they're benign, but you are smart, so I know you'll see a doctor about it."

She tells her listeners, "Don't go out and buy a new wardrobe, you can wear anything you've got in the closet now and if you can't, we'll show you how."

She talks enthusiastically about new additions to the program to help the new patient and says with pride, "We are in the highest brackets of complete recovery when detection is made early."

WHAT SHE WANTS she says, "is for Reach to Recovery to be synonymous with 'help' for every woman who will ever have to face breast surgery."

Every one who made a contribution to the American Cancer Society's door-to-door march in April had "a little part of their dollar go to Reach to Recovery," Mrs. Lasser said, "but contributions may also be earmarked directly for our use. And all proceeds from my book go directly to the program and your purchase price is tax deductible."

Mrs. Lasser just returned from the Orient where eight programs had gotten under way before she left, and she will be starting more in France this spring.

All of her literature can be obtained in this area through the Oakland County Unit of the American Cancer Society at 295 Elm Street, Birmingham.

Sisterhood plans 2-day rummage sale

The Sisterhood of Temple Beth El will hold a rummage sale Thursday and Friday, June 5 and 6, at the temple, 7400 Telegraph Road, Bloomfield Township.

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