

A positive attitude

□ Woman leads fight against breast cancer

By Darlene Polachic
for The Saskatoon Sun

When life hands out lemons, Francesca Iosca-Pagnin believes in turning the sour fruit into lemonade. That is exactly what she did in 1994 when she was diagnosed with breast cancer.

"I knew that, in order to survive, I had to set an attainable, short-term goal," Iosca-Pagnin said. "Being a teacher by profession and an analytical and pro-active sort by nature, I embarked on a program of information and education about breast cancer. I called my presentations 'Fighting Back Through Education.' They provided me with the vehicle to share my experience in the hope it would help other women in the fight against this insidious disease known as breast cancer."

Iosca-Pagnin gave her presentations to schools, churches and community clubs, agencies, and associations.

In so doing, she soon realized that "taking a bad situation and turning it into something positive" was helping to stimulate the healing process.

As further insurance, she set herself a long-term goal, something to work toward. That became the 1998 and 1999 Breast Cancer Walks, community wide events and fund-raisers for breast cancer in Saskatoon. Iosca-Pagnin said they were "unprecedented, outstanding successes, thanks to the generosity of Saskatchewan people."

Some of the funds raised from the 1998 Walk were used to purchase an apheresis machine for the Saskatchewan Stem Cell Program. It meant women no longer needed to travel out-of-province to have stem cell transplant treatment.

In the fall of 2000, Iosca-Pagnin read an article in *Chatelaine* magazine about One-Stop Quick Diagnosis Breast Health Centres, facilities that address women's health concerns quickly and efficiently using state-of-the-art equipment. The article included a sidebar with information on getting such a centre established in one's own community.

"That became my goal for Saskatoon," Iosca-Pagnin said. "I immediately began taking the first steps to bring such a centre to Saskatoon." A gala fund-raiser/launch was scheduled. SaskPlace was on board. Approaches were in the works to bring in Bryan Adams as the event headliner.

Then disaster hit. Iosca-Pagnin was diagnosed with a breast cancer recurrence and plans had to be put on hold while she dealt with this fresh batch of lemons.

With optimism and resolve, she once again determined to turn the negative into a positive. This time, while dealing with the emotional turmoil of recurrence, an aborted mastectomy surgery, and a dramatic series of events that led to her being cancer-free, Iosca-Pagnin began keeping a detailed journal of everything that was taking place in her life medically, emotionally and spiritually. She was seized with need to share her story in an inspiring, yet practical book she

calls *'Reflections 'NPink On The Wings Of Love.'* At same time, Iosca-Pagnin designed a complementary gold-plated, crystal-encrusted butterfly pin/pendant she christened 'NLove 'NSpirit.'

In the meantime, Francesca's dream of a Breast Health Centre was also in the minds of others in Saskatoon. Plans were initiated for the province's first such facility, the Centre of Care, to be located at Saskatoon City Hospital.

"This will be a one-stop breast cancer diagnosis and treatment facility," said Randy Kershaw, executive director of the Centre of Care Campaign. "The Centre will be a magnificent and dramatic improvement in the care and support we can provide to breast cancer victims. We will be bringing state-of-the art equipment and treatment to our province for the benefit of women from all across Saskatchewan."

The projected opening of the Centre of Care is Fall 2005.

When Iosca-Pagnin heard about the plan, she knew immediately she wanted to be a part of it. She drew up a proposal for a Campaign 'NPink and presented it to the board and executive members of Saskatoon City Hospital Foundation. The Campaign 'NPink would be a gala fund-raiser for the new centre and serve as a launch for her new book and pin/pendant, as well. Her plan was to donate the proceeds from the sale of her books and pins toward the purchase of equipment for the new Centre of Care.

The proposal was met with enthusiasm. The media also responded eagerly. Many local and provincial businesses and institutions have come on board, and Co-operative Trust Company of Canada agreed to become the title sponsor.

As a result, An Evening 'NPink will take place this Thursday, May 6, in the Atrium of Saskatoon City Hospital beginning at 7 p.m. Iosca-Pagnin said the public is cordially invited.

"The entire Atrium will be decorated in pink: pink balloons and balloon bouquets, pink streamers, pink table cloths, pink refreshments. Pink desserts, compliments of Saskatoon Co-op, will be served. The opening ceremony will commence with a ribbon cutting at 7:30 p.m."

Everyone is invited to wear pink. There will be pink breast cancer awareness ribbons available, as well as a table 'NPink with information on breast cancer. People will be able to pay tribute to a breast cancer survivor or a loved one by displaying their name on a pink butterfly. "Every day, Canada-wide, 56 women are diagnosed with breast cancer," Iosca-Pagnin explained, "and every day, 15 women die from it. Breast cancer is something that touches the lives of many. 'NLove we support those living with it; 'NSpirit we remember those who are no longer with us."

Other highlights of the evening will include a candle-lighting ceremony and music by 3 Pack. Steve Shannon from CJWW and breast cancer survivor Lisa Rendall, formerly from C95, will reveal a mysterious Pinkstruck Surprise. In addition, guests can expect many



—Photo by Darlene Polachic

Francesca Iosca-Pagnin

wonderful door prizes and the opportunity to purchase a book and have it signed by the author.

All proceeds from sale of Iosca-Pagnin's book and pin/pendant, as well as donations made to Campaign 'NPink, are earmarked for

the purchase of equipment for Saskatchewan's first Breast Health Centre.

Donations can be made payable to: Campaign 'NPink, Saskatoon City Hospital Foundation. Receipts will be issued for dona-

tions of \$10 or more.

For more information, visit www.reflectionsnpink.com or phone 655-8415. Books and pins are available at all participating Credit Unions and City Hospital Gift Shop.