

‘Bras on Broadway’ Raises \$4,500 for Breast Cancer Program at AMH

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The “Bras on Broadway” event held in October at Alton’s Jacoby Arts Center was a rousing success, with \$4,500 raised for Alton Memorial Hospital’s “You’ve Got a Friend” program to support breast cancer patients.

The exhibit was a perfect vehicle for some whimsical works of art. But mixed in with the mirth were some poignant stories that made the fund raiser even more meaningful for those involved. The event featured 50 artful bras. There were bras with a football theme, a basketball theme, cupcakes, a “Candela-bra” and even one resembling two ice cream cones (“Let’s Lick Breast Cancer”).

Amidst those was one called “La Nostra Bella Mama,” or “Our Beautiful Mom.” It was designed by Abbi and Alex Barnhart, ages 14 and 10, respectively, in honor of their mother, Kristen Galloway Barnhart, who died of breast cancer in January 2012.

“Each picture on the bra represents something about our mom we will never forget,” they wrote. “The animal print is for the sweater she made her final journey in. The sun is for all the days we spent at Raging Rivers (a water park in Grafton, Ill.). The ocean is for the trip she was planning, when she fell ill, for us to swim with dolphins. The football and ice skates surrounded by our birthstones are for our dreams she supported. The flower is for the Gerber daisies she planted every summer on the deck below the hummingbird feeder.”

It was displays like that which surprised Marlene Lewis of the AMH Development Office when she first viewed the exhibit.

“I was expecting to see amusing and lighthearted bras, and get a good laugh,” she said. “Instead, I was very moved by so many beautiful messages and surprised by how emotional the exhibit was.”

Dee Kilgo, the event and benefit organizer, submitted the “Candela-Bra” in memory of a friend who fought breast cancer for many years.

“Barbara inspired me, and I still miss her,” Kilgo said. “She would have loved this exhibit.”

“Let’s Lick Breast Cancer” was created by Jane Vieth, who discovered she had breast cancer when she was a pregnant 32-year-old.



“Dr. Donald Hardbeck delivered my baby at Alton Memorial Hospital and not long after that Dr. Robert Hamilton performed my mastectomy surgery,” Vieth said. “That was 35 years ago, and luckily I’ve never had another problem.”

Dr. Hamilton was the high bidder on the bra that Vieth submitted.

Kilgo’s son, Matt, is a plastic surgeon on Long Island and one of his specialties is reconstructive breast surgery. He informed his mother about a similar exhibit in the New York area, with all of the bras made by breast cancer survivors.

“Over the last 20 years, there’s never been a time that I wasn’t worrying about someone close to me who was battling breast cancer,” Kilgo said. “Because art bras have become so closely associated with breast cancer fund raising, they’ve become a universal symbol of both the struggle against breast cancer and also the triumph of beating the disease.”

The reception on Oct. 25 was attended by more than 100 people. The bra that drew the highest bid of the evening was “Hoo-Hoo-Hooters,” featuring two owls and designed by Katy Wills. Cora Miller had the winning bid of \$250. Meanwhile, the “Bra-Vo” award for the bra that got the most votes went to Rose Tomlinson, who made a bra with an autumn theme. Visitors to the exhibit paid \$1 each to vote.

“My sister lives in Boulder (Colorado) and she will be donating this to a breast cancer center out there for display,” Tomlinson said. “I made it in honor of several friends of mine who have had breast cancer.”

The “You’ve Got A Friend” program at Alton Memorial helps Malea Watson, the AMH breast health navigator, to provide physical, financial and emotional support to breast cancer patients. The program originated with a grant from the Susan G. Komen Foundation, but fund raisers such as Bras on Broadway are necessary to keep the program going.

“Dee worked extremely hard on this project,” Lewis said. “It’s all due to her cleverness. It’s great to coordinate these kinds of efforts with the hospital’s needs. Alton Memorial enjoys partnering with organizations in the community, and Jacoby Arts Center is the perfect venue for this event.”

The exhibit was on view for three weeks at Jacoby Arts Center before the reception, which also included a special pink “Bra-tini” from Bossanova Restaurant and Lounge in Alton, a cake from My Just Desserts in keeping with the theme, plus entertainment from a local band called – what else? -- Off the Shoulder.