

# Cancer Patient 'Paints' New Life for Herself, Others

April 30 2022 8:10 AM



ALTON - For many people, a cancer diagnosis is nothing short of devastating, For Elizabeth Denis, it helped her create a clearer picture of her life. And now those pictures are works of art she does for the benefit of her caregivers at Alton Memorial Hospital as well as fellow patients.

Denis, 58, was diagnosed with breast cancer in 2010 and had a bilateral mastectomy. She is on treatment indefinitely at the AMH Cancer and Infusion Center, but even long after she isn't coming her influence will be felt – and seen – in that office.

“I had a blood clot about two and a half years ago and almost quit,” Elizabeth said. “Then I met Misty Biciocchi (a nurse practitioner with Washington University Physicians of Illinois in the Infusion Center office). There was just something about Misty. And also Dr. Alfred Greco in that office is just the kindest, most laid-back guy in the world. I wanted to do something for them.”

But even Elizabeth didn't know that would be until a vision she had after one of her chemotherapy treatments.

“I'm usually up for 36-48 hours after the chemo, and they say you can get a little loopy with that,” she said with a laugh. “I had this vision of me painting, and keep in mind there was nothing artistic about me.”

Until then. Elizabeth felt the need to get some paint and some brushes, and she went to work. She used anything she could get her hands on for a painting surface, including ceramic tile, barn wood, even serving trays. She buys or finds these materials to paint on, then brings the paintings to staff members or other patients.

“Now I guess I'm good enough that they ask for stuff to give to the other patients,” Elizabeth said. “It was God giving me something to give back to people. It's usually just florals. I have a dear friend who was a florist, and I ask her what I've painted AFTER I've painted it!”

It's not hard to argue that Elizabeth is helping the Infusion Center staff treat their patients, or that she is helping them as much as they are helping her.

“Beth has found that cancer is a part of her life, but it is not her whole life,” said Jill Allen, assistant nurse manager of the Infusion Center. “Her paintings are a way to bless others.”

“These nurses here are definitely called,” Elizabeth said. “I bet when they interview potential nurses here they want to know how caring they are as much as anything. They are nurses, but above and beyond anything else they are my friends.”

Paula Appleby's office in the Infusion Center is practically Elizabeth's art gallery, but her work is sprinkled throughout the other rooms, too. And keeping busy with painting has given Elizabeth an attitude toward her cancer shared by very few – if any – others.

“People always say they want to beat cancer, but I don’t want to beat it,” she said. “It’s part of me. I just have to push through it a little, and the staff here and the painting does that for me.

“I worked in a Lutheran preschool for years, so I always giving. Then I worked in activities at Collinsville Rehab and Health Care. I was doing God’s work there, but I had to give up that job with cancer. You have to keep going, and this is what keeps me going.”

