

Breast Cancer Survivor Shares How Alton's OSF Moeller Cancer Center Supported Her

by Sydney Sinks, News Reporter
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ALTON - In 2019, Cathy Keller attended the ribbon cutting ceremony at OSF Moeller Cancer Center in Alton. She never expected that she would one day be a patient.

Now cancer-free, Keller is honoring Breast Cancer Awareness Month by sharing her story and advocating for OSF Moeller Cancer Center. She thanks the doctors and nurses at the Moeller Center who supported her every step of the way.

“It’s just a family of concerned nurses and doctors that just want the best for you. Moeller is top of my list,” Keller said. “It was scary, but that’s what’s so wonderful about Moeller. You feel like a family member as soon as you walk in the door.”

The staff knew Keller by her first name and treated her more like a friend than a patient. She remembers sitting in her cubicle during chemo treatments, listening as a nurse moved down the line of cubicles and chatted with each person individually about how they felt, what they needed, what was new.

Keller’s 2021 breast cancer diagnosis caught her completely off-guard. She didn’t have a family history of cancer; she was active; she was diligent about her yearly mammograms. Figuring the risk was low, she never did self-examinations.

But while self-exams are important and can alert you to any changes, a lot of tumors go undiscovered until a mammogram. Keller had a seven-milligram tumor and didn’t feel anything. It underlines the importance of mammograms — Keller recommends scheduling a mammogram for your birth month every year.

“One out of eight women will end up with breast cancer,” she explained. “I had no idea that I had breast cancer, and if I wouldn’t have got that mammogram on a regular basis, it probably would have ended up in my lymph nodes and it would have been a much worse situation.”

After undergoing a biopsy and lumpectomy, Keller started preventative chemotherapy and radiation treatments under the care of oncologists Dr. Manpreet Sandhu and Dr. James Piephoff at OSF Moeller Cancer Center. But during her first chemotherapy treatment, Keller went into anaphylactic shock. Sandhu was diligent about finding a solution.

“Bless Dr. Sandhu’s heart, I said, ‘I’m not doing this again. I’m not taking any more chemo,’” Keller remembered. “And she took it upon herself to find a chemo that would help me not have that reaction...I was a little scared to go back, but I went back because I had true trust in Dr. Sandhu that she would absolutely take care of me, and she did. So I breezed through the rest of the chemo, thank goodness for Dr. Sandhu and the nursing staff over at the Moeller Center.”

Keller also developed neuropathy, a common chemo side effect. Once again, Sandhu was determined to help, and she made sure Keller had bags of ice to hold onto during chemo to decrease the neuropathy's effects. Knowing that Sandhu, Piephoff and the nurses supported Keller through her treatment made an incredibly difficult experience seem much more manageable.

"They were there for me," Keller said. "You have to have those people in your corner."

Now that Keller is cancer-free and back in action at her job with Alton Community Unit School District #11, she works to raise awareness. Superintendent Dr. Kristie Baumgartner collaborated with Keller to commemorate Breast Cancer Awareness Month. The district purchased 3,200 wristbands for students and staff members to show their support. At Alton High School, a senior student organized a "Pink Out Night" at the most recent football game, and Keller thanked him personally.

The community's love is touching to Keller, who pays it forward by supporting OSF Moeller. She encourages friends to seek treatment at OSF Moeller and shares her experience through articles like ["A Breast Cancer Survivor's Toolkit."](#)

As October continues, Keller encourages people to schedule their yearly mammograms and perform self-exams once a month. (Experts recommend doing a self-exam a few days to a week after starting your period.) By spreading awareness and supporting the medical professionals in our community, Keller hopes to see more people helped by OSF Moeller Cancer Center.

"I try to advocate as much as I can for Moeller and OSF because they're right here in our backyard. Why not use them?" she said. "At Moeller, you are getting the best care. You are not a number at all. You walk through the door and they know who you are...It's just so neat to see how we can all band together and fight this thing when we have to."

For more information about OSF Moeller Cancer Center and resources on breast cancer, visit the [OSF Healthcare website](#) and [Moeller Cancer Center webpage](#).