

# A SURVIVOR'S DETERMINATION

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When Irma Schnessel was diagnosed with ovarian cancer in 2000, she was overcome with a variety of emotions.

One of them, she was surprised to discover, was relief — that the cancer was detected early.

"I had the good fortune of having a physician who knew the warning signs, who saw my CT scans and knew I needed more tests," Mrs. Schnessel said.

Eight years, countless rounds of chemotherapy and a surgery later, Mrs. Schnessel, 64, wants to share her experience and knowledge with other women in her community. She has created a two-part ovarian cancer awareness program to present at Marian Community Hospital in Carbondale.

The program began on Wednesday with a seminar hosted by several area health professionals and will conclude today with a panel discussion and a brunch, complete with informative literature.

"It's up to women to educate themselves on what questions to ask their doctors, and what physical signs to look for," she said.

"You need to be your own advocate."

To acquire take-home literature for the event, Mrs. Schnessel has been in touch with several national cancer organizations. Her favorites include the Canary Foundation, which donates money for research of an early-detection diagnostic test, and the National Ovarian Cancer Coalition. Mrs. Schnes-



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**Irma Schnessel of Carbondale, an ovarian cancer survivor, created an ovarian cancer awareness program at Marian Community Hospital. The two-part program began Wednesday and concludes today with a brunch and panel discussion.**

sel hopes to develop a local chapter of the latter.

"I've got pins, pamphlets and handouts from both," she said.

The project was one that Mrs. Schnessel has thought about organizing for "some time." She was "thrilled" to learn that hospital staff was receptive to her idea. Since September is National Ovarian Cancer Awareness Month, Mrs. Schnessel feels that her program is right on time.

"Of course, it's always a good time to talk about cancer prevention," she said.

Mrs. Schnessel makes her home in Carbondale with her husband, Ben. Her daughter, Fern Richter, and her granddaughter, Austyn, 6, of Cliff Manor, N.Y. are two of the reasons she is such a strong advocate for

ovarian cancer awareness.

"There are studies that say there is a genetic link to ovarian cancer, and even colon cancer," she said. "Knowing that I have a daughter and granddaughter spur me on and make me want to know as much as I can."

Mrs. Schnessel also had a cousin, Sandy Abraham of Philadelphia, who died in September 2007 of ovarian cancer. Her cousin, she said, organized benefits for research and shared her experiences with many.

"Sandy was diagnosed too late, but she fought so hard," Mrs. Schnessel said. "I'm doing this for her, too."

Maria Diehl, public relations specialist at Marian Community Hospital, mentioned that people like Irma are a valuable asset to the community.

## Good Neighbors

### Irma Schnessel

**Awareness crusade:** Mrs. Schnessel of Carbondale, an ovarian cancer survivor, organized an ovarian cancer awareness program at Marian Community Hospital in Carbondale. She contacted organizations like the National Ovarian Cancer Coalition and the Canary Foundation to obtain informative literature for the program.

**Family ties:** Mrs. Schnessel has a daughter, Fern Richter, and a granddaughter, Austyn, 6. Her cousin, Sandy Abraham, died in 2007 after battling ovarian cancer. "My daughter and granddaughter keep me going," she said, "and I'm doing this for Sandy. ... She was also a fighter and an advocate."

**Spreading the word:** Mrs. Schnessel hopes the seminar will prompt women to ask more questions and look for more warning signs of ovarian cancer. "It's called a silent killer for a reason," she said. "Right now, early detection is the only chance of survival."

"Irma's dedication and enthusiasm are untiring," Ms. Diehl said.

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