\*Submitted Photos:

Heather: Heather rings the bell to signify radiation treatments are complete.

The first two pictures: The day of her surgery, Heather’s friends made a “breast friends” poster and signed it.

Friends and coworkers joined Heather for the Komen Walk for the Cure.

Heather and Dr. Erin Zusan walked in the Komen Walk for the Cure.

**I Pink I Can**

**Center Grove women stress the importance of being proactive in getting mammograms after their own breast cancer diagnosis this year**

By Nicole Davis

It’s hard not to notice the pink during the month of October. Breast Cancer Awareness messages appear on t-shirts, commercials, buttons and billboards – it’s everywhere. The campaign works, as millions of men and women not only spread the word about the importance of getting check-ups, but raise money for additional research to find a cure.

In recognition of Breast Cancer Awareness Month, Center Grove Icon has gone pink – from the logo to the page numbers. Here, two women with Center Grove ties share their stories about their breast cancer diagnosis this year, why early detection is important and how they’ve overcome the challenges.

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When Center Grove resident **Heather Heckler** turned 40, she started scheduling an annual mammogram. This January, like every year, she went in for the appointment at Community Hospital South. This year was different.

At age 44, she was diagnosed with invasive ductal carcinoma, the most common form of breast cancer. Without a mammogram, Heather says she would have never realized that she had breast cancer. The lump was too small to feel, and she felt no symptoms.

“I try to get that message out about mammograms,” Heather says. “I feel like it’s a really important thing. I’ve tried to stress that in my stories on Facebook, or try to tell women who say they were recommended to go every other year. If I would have waited, it could have been worse.”

Heather grew up in Bloomington and graduated from Indiana University. She married in 1997 and moved to Kalamazoo, Mich., where they had two children, Ellie, 15, and Carson, 12. They moved to the Center Grove area in 2002. In March, 2013 her husband passed away unexpectedly.

Heather received a call about her mammogram results the morning following the routine exam. That afternoon she went in for a diagnostic test, and Dr. Erin Zusan did the biopsy.

“This was 3:30, 4 on a Friday afternoon,” Heather says. “Before I left she said she was pretty sure I had cancer but wouldn’t know the results until Monday or Tuesday. That was a rough weekend.”

After learning of the diagnosis and tentatively planning the steps they would need to take, Heather says she was able to tell her children.

“It’s really scary when someone tells you that you have cancer,” Heather says. “Breast cancer is probably the best kind of cancer to get as far as the most researched and treatable. You know that there are survivors all over the place. I know many women who have been through it. A part of me said this is breast cancer, you can deal with this. But I was worried about my children. I felt especially apprehensive talking to them about it because as a 12, 14 year old, they had already lost their dad a couple of years ago.”

She asked to wait to do the surgery until April, so she could go on spring break with her children. The first surgery was April 10. They removed two tumors, one being so small it was only found through an MRI.

Eight days later Heather participated in the Susan G. Komen Race for the Cure. She works as a clinical technician for Community Surgery Center South, and approximately 30 of her coworkers joined to walk with her. She says the surgery center director, Mark Walke, paid the entrance fees for the staff that wanted to join.

Heather received another call that she needed one more surgery to remove more of the cancer. She says fortunately, her cancer did not require chemotherapy. She went through 10 weeks of radiation, starting late May.

“I was off work for a total of a month,” Heather says. “I worked the whole time I was doing (radiation). I had been told I’d be really tired with the radiation treatments. The job I have at the surgery center is fairly physical... I worked the whole time I was doing that.”

Heather says she had good support from her family, friends, coworkers and community throughout this past year, and says she’s been feeling well since the radiation is complete.

“My boyfriend keeps telling me how proud he is of how I handled everything,” Heather says. “I feel like I didn’t have a choice. But, I feel like I never felt sorry for myself. I’m a fairly positive person. I think I’m stronger than I thought I was.”

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**Lodema (Decker) Lines** says she feels like attitude and outlook on life have a lot do with your healing process. Even while receiving chemotherapy for her breast cancer treatment, she says she would often offer words of encouragement to women who might not have had family with them, or would walk down the cancer center halls talking with the other ladies she got to know.

“I found out there’s so many people out there that are going through the same thing I was going through, and I found out if you’re willing to talk, open up and tell your story, there might be one person that can be helped,” Lodema says. “Then it’s worth it. It’s worth being able to give someone that hope to say if she did it, I can do it.”

Lodema is a 1978 graduate of Center Grove High School. She and her husband, Bob, have six children and 11 grandchildren. They currently reside in Camby, Ind., but are searching for a new house around the Center Grove area, closer to their church home at Mount Pleasant Christian Church.

Lodema says she has always been proactive about her health, and has gone every year for a mammogram. She went on Dec. 31, 2014 and received a call on Jan. 5 to come back for another one. On Jan. 6 they did a biopsy. She was informed that she had stage 3 breast cancer.

“We were devastated, to say the least,” Lodema says. “She went over my records and discovered my diagnosis was the same as it was the year before and the year before that. They all looked the same, the size of it, so she was befuddled that it had been missed. When I was diagnosed on Jan. 9, I found out that I had breast cancer for five years.”

Lodema says she and Bob prayed about the situation for a week before deciding to take legal action on the misdiagnosis. They are still waiting to hear more about the investigation process.

“I’ve decided to leave it in the Lord’s hands,” Lodema says. “I’m doing this because I wonder how many other women have been misdiagnosed. Who has died from not getting diagnosed and it could have been prevented?”

Lodema was encouraged to transfer to Community Hospital South for her treatment. While the cancer was in one breast, Lodema chose to get a bilateral mastectomy, both breasts removed. Doctors removed 21 lymph nodes. Five were cancerous. Chemo took two months and radiation took another couple of months. She finished radiation treatment a month ago and is in remission.

“I lost all my hair, from my head to my toes,” Lodema says. “My hair just started growing back. I’m still seeing doctors. I have a great team of doctors. I never had any symptoms. The symptoms I had, I was tired. I didn’t feel good. I was sick more often. I wound up with shingles on my side. Now I’m so much healthier. It’s night and day to where I was less than a year ago.”

Lodema says her biggest motivation to keep fighting through the treatment is her faith, referring to the Bible verse, Philippians 4:13: “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”

“I’m a firm believer that if you put God first in everything, then He’s got you,” Lodema says. “He will get you through everything. I have a great support system. I have a good church family. I have four girls and two boys. My husband had just had a double knee replacement. My two boys took FMLA from their jobs and would come sit with me when I was getting my chemo, every time. I had my kids, my grandkids. My workplace, IUPUI School of Education, when I was sick they were always supportive of whenever I needed to leave because I didn’t feel well. You can’t ask for a better support system.”

Lodema will have reconstructive surgery in March, and has a lot of ongoing tests. She says she would encourage other women to remain proactive about their health, go in for a mammogram, do self-examinations no matter their age, and don’t hesitate to ask for a second opinion. She also found it important to get connected to other women with breast cancer, and share stories about their journey.

“This is nothing compared to what some people are going through,” Lodema says. “I find myself blessed.”