

## INSPIRATIONS

Gail Parker first felt a lump in her breast while getting ready one morning. She immediately made several doctor's visits and underwent many tests, finally learning she was diagnosed with breast cancer while visiting the state Capitol in Austin.



Gail and her husband Randy enjoyed attending multiple galas while she was president of the CFBCA, including the Wharton County Junior College Foundation Gala in 2010.



# Staying Positive through the Storm

Former Central Fort Bend Chamber Alliance president's optimistic personality helps her stay positive while battling breast cancer

Written by Erica Martinez and Julie Dold | Select Photography by Barry Sigman

As she was getting ready one morning, Gail Parker felt a lump in her breast. "When I first felt the lump, I somehow instinctively knew that it was cancer," she recalls. "I cannot explain why. Perhaps, it was some sort of sixth sense that we probably have about our own bodies." Parker's optimistic, can-do attitude has made her a delight among many Fort Bend friends, including her colleagues in the Central Fort Bend Chamber Alliance (CFBCA), where she served as president until just recently. Approaching her battle against cancer with that same hopeful and courageous spirit, she continues to inspire others.

## Learning the Diagnosis

After discovering the lump, Parker made many doctor's visits, undergoing chest X-rays, mammograms, ultrasounds, and even a needle biopsy. During the week she waited for her results, she kept on with business as usual. On the day of the impending news, alongside the chamber's Leadership Fort Bend group, she was meeting with legislators at the state Capitol. The phone call only lasted three minutes. "My husband had opted to take off work and accompany me to Austin, so he was with me that day in the hallway and immediately wrapped his arms around me," says Parker. She had been diagnosed with stage two, aggressive, triple-negative, ductal cell carcinoma.

## A Helping Hand

After learning her diagnosis, Parker contacted her friend Leena Taneja, the director of physician relations and marketing at Methodist Sugar Land Hospital, whom she had met several months earlier. Having many questions about the diagnosis, Parker went straight to work learning about what to expect. "Being a novice when it came to cancer, I wanted to quickly educate myself and ensure that I was stepping off in the right direction," she says, adding, "Leena immediately became my coach, my confidante, and a super cheerleader."

## Destroying the Enemy

Parker quickly began fighting the disease with chemotherapy sessions, which spanned across 133 days. "From day one up to about three weeks after the final treatment, I never really felt good," she recalls, adding, "The bottom line, however, is that I never stopped telling myself that it was the lesser of two evils, and it was destroying the enemy – cancer."

When her white blood cell count decreased after treatment, Parker was told to avoid people as much as possible. "Most of the time I tried to err on the side of caution, however a few times, I pushed the limit," she says. "One of those times I paid dearly, as I became so sick with some sort of virus that I ended up in the hospital for three days." It was then that she made the difficult decision to resign as president of the CFBCA and focus more on her health.

## A Loving Supporter

Throughout her battle with breast cancer, Parker's husband, Randy has been her biggest and best supporter. "Randy is my rock," she says. "He has been by my side every step of the way, through a multitude of doctor's visits, tests, hospitalizations, and chemo treatments."

When Parker learned the chemotherapy she was receiving would cause her to lose her hair, she decided to go ahead and shave her head. Randy stood by her side the whole time. "He was even with me when I made the very difficult trip to my hair salon to have my rapidly thinning hair shaved off," says Parker. "[That was] the most emotional, personal event that I had to face."

Enduring months of chemo, surgery, and recovery time has been difficult, but having Randy there to support and cheer her on has been one of her greatest comforts. "I try not to let things get to me

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Throughout her battle with breast cancer, Gail's husband Randy has stood by her side and supported her

**"He has always been my knight in shining armor."**

-Gail Parker

very often, but the times that I do get completely overwhelmed, it's his arms that soothe me and help me remember how very blessed I am," she shares. "He has always been my knight in shining armor."

### Beating Breast Cancer

Parker underwent six rounds of chemotherapy over a four-month period and in July she had a 12-hour bilateral mastectomy and immediate reconstructive surgery. Because of the type of cancer she suffered and the possibility that it may return, she will have to make frequent doctor's visits and get tested from time to time. Fortunately, though, she will not have to take medication or radiation treatment or have any additional chemotherapy treatments. "I can look back and see how far I have come," says Parker. "I know that I can concentrate on my recovery and not have to go through that again."

She focuses on looking toward the bright side and not letting cancer affect her outlook on life. "While neither my doctors nor I can predict the future, I have every reason to expect continued, good results with a cancer-free outcome for the long haul," she shares. "Perhaps that is just the 'Pollyanna' in me surfacing again, but nonetheless, it is the future I am projecting."

### Counting Her Blessings

Parker is truly an inspiration for women who battle breast cancer around the Fort Bend area. She has stayed humble and strong through her fight and does not plan on quitting anytime soon. "Live life to the fullest - it's like a really good book that ends before you are ready," she advises. "Work hard, love passionately, take care of yourself, set goals, don't procrastinate, and never forget to thank God for the many blessings in your life." SLM

ERICA MARTINEZ enjoys being a freelance writer and mother of two.

JULIE DOLD loves being the editorial coordinator for Sugar Land Magazine and truly appreciates Gail Parker sharing her story.

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# Breast Cancer Support Groups

For local meeting times and locations, contact any one of the following:

American Cancer Society  
800-227-2345

M. D. Anderson Cancer Center in Sugar Land  
281-566-1800

Memorial Hermann Sugar Land Hospital  
281-725-5000

Methodist Sugar Land Hospital  
281-274-7164

OakBend Medical Center  
281-633-4077

St. Luke's Sugar Land Hospital  
Breast Friends Support Group  
281-566-1908

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Gail Parker greets Michael Garfield, known as the High Tech Texan, and Governor Rick Perry during the 2009 Celebration Ball hosted by the Central Fort Bend Chamber Alliance

Photo by Marisa Hugonnet



Gail and Randy Parker at Legacy Ford's 2010 Mardi Gras celebration

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