



OFF TO THE RACES
THOUSANDS PARTY, RAISE MONEY FOR CHARITY
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CARROO
BREAKS THROUGH FOR RUTGERS
SPORTS, C1

OCTOBER 20, 2013

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AIMEE'S STORY

'From chemo to surgery, she has been calm and positive.'



Breast cancer patient Aimee Parani rests in a "quiet room" prior to double mastectomy and breast reconstruction surgery on Oct. 10 at Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital in New Brunswick. JASON TOWLEN/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Surgery helps close book on breast cancer chapter

By Cheryl Makin :: @Cheryl Makin

Third in a series

NEW BRUNSWICK — The day that Aimee Parani thought would never get here arrived in a rainy haze. It was Oct. 10, the day of her bilateral mastectomy and reconstructive surgery.

"For so long, we were just taking it one day at a time — through the chemo, then the delivery. When we first got the date for the surgery after a followup visit from the chemo, we were given a date the week before my sister's wedding," she said. "We knew that wasn't good. The next date was three weeks later. That was much better. But, when we heard the date, it just seemed so far away."

Dr. Deborah Toppmeyer of Rutgers Cancer Institute of New Jersey first saw Parani with a "new breast mass and 12 weeks pregnant" in February.

"At the time, she had been seen in Florida and came up here. We did chemo up front to shrink the tumor. It had also spread to one lymph node that was palpable," Toppmeyer said. "We did the chemo first as opposed to the surgery first. We wouldn't be doing anything differently in terms of her prognosis, but her being pregnant

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Chris Parani (left) waits with his mother-in-law, Millie Fraley, and sister-in-law Kim Pope, while his wife, Aimee, undergoes surgery. JASON TOWLEN/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

ONLINE EXCLUSIVE

In connection with the series "Breast cancer, a baby and the BRCA gene: Aimee's story," see [MyCentralJersey.com](http://mycentraljersey.com) story on Aimee Parani's recovery at home and care after surgery. Plus, a video exclusive: An inside look at Point Pleasant native Aimee Parani's battle with breast cancer — <http://mycj.co/155C7ON>

A CARING COMMUNITY

People make the difference

Oct. 26 is the day organizers of local projects need help

By Paul C. Grzella
@PaulGrzellamycj

For Maria Strada and Pete Clark, Saturday is all about beginnings.

Strada, the executive director of Middle Earth, hopes the Make A Difference Day basketball game in Bound Brook her organization is hosting that afternoon will introduce the broader community to her youth-services organization.

"I hope people come out and support the charities that we are trying to raise money for," Strada said. "I also hope that they see how much effort the kids have put into the different activities going on that day, and see that they really care about our community."

"This is also a great opportunity for people to learn about what we do. We've been around for 30 years, but I'm always surprised that there are a lot of people who don't know about all of the services we provide."

The Make A Difference Day project being coordinated by Clark at North Brunswick High School, where he is principal, involves refurbishing a butterfly garden that was severely damaged by superstorm Sandy and since has fallen into further disrepair.

"I want people to understand that this is something anyone can do," Clark said. "People can help us and get ideas about an event that they can do next year. I want projects to be happening all over the township, so that it becomes a real movement."

Both of these projects are being funded by \$5,000 grants from the Gannett Foundation. They are among the dozens of projects happening locally and thousands occurring nationally as part of the USA Weekend-sponsored Make A Difference Day.

The projects happening Saturday can be done alone or by friends, family, co-workers or strangers who see a need and want together to do something to make life better for their neighbors.

For more than 21 years, Make A Difference Day has been powered by hundreds of supporting newspapers and long-standing partner Points of Light to mobilize millions of people across the U.S. for a single day to help change the communities in which they live.

The organizers of these two local projects are working with dozens of similar community-

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COLOR IN BLACK & WHITE

PR initiatives not working; we need to crack down on, confront bullies

I really tried this time. I wanted to hold it in, but I can't.

Today, I again am going to type about bullying.

In previous episodes, you have read me complaining about what I call useless public relations initiatives about bullying. What's wrong with them? Well, first, these initiatives would have you believe that only children get bullied. Wrong. Second, they would have you believe that simply telling someone you are being bullied is going to result in you getting assistance. Wrong. Third, we live in a society in which if you are male and do not "man up," "act strong," or live up to some ridiculous TV-generated



definition of what a "man" is supposed to be, you will face even more bullying — in the form of ridicule and such.

Do you want an example? The most recent glaring case I can site is the media backlash against University of South Carolina football defensive end Jadeveon Clowney. An outstanding football

player who is projected as a top selection in the 2014 NFL Draft, Clowney a couple of weeks back took himself out of the lineup before a game and was thrown under the bus by his head coach Steve Spurrier and widely assailed by the news media and by fans on message boards galore. Clowney said he was injured. Many from his group of critics assume that he just is trying to protect himself from getting hurt before he signs a multimillion-dollar National Football League contract. Of course you have to hear all the pundits talking about "real men" play hurt for the good

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WEATHER

AREA FIVE-DAY FORECAST

Table with 5 columns: Today, Tomorrow, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday. Includes weather icons, descriptions (Mostly sunny, Partly cloudy), and temperatures (63/40, 65/47, 67/41, 59/38, 58/36).

West winds 10 to 15 knots with gusts up to 25 knots. Waves around 2 ft.

MARINE FORECAST

COMFORT INDICATORS

Sunburn Index: 4
Air Quality: Good
Heat Index: 52° 56° 61°
Garden Forecast: Sunny. Highs in the lower 60s. West winds 10 to 15 mph.

ALMANAC

New Brunswick Readings
Values are for 24 hours ending 5 p.m. yesterday.
Information provided by Rutgers Meteorology Department, Cook College.
Temperatures: High 70, Low 39, Average 55, Normal High 64, Normal low 47, Normal average 53.

TIDES

Table with columns: At Sandy Hook, Keypoint at Raritan Bay, High Tides (A.M., P.M.), Low Tides (A.M., P.M.).

SUN AND MOON

Table with columns: Last, New, First, Full, and dates (Oct 26, Nov 3, Nov 10, Nov 17).

Precipitation: Yesterday 0.00", Month-to-date 0.56", Year-to-date 37.51"

Records: High temp. 82 (1945), Low temp. 30 (1948), High temp. today 80 (1969), Low temp. today 31 (1974).

Degree Days: Cooling degree days 0, Month-to-date 7, Season-to-date 609.

LOTTERIES

SATURDAY, OCT. 19

NEW JERSEY

Midday Pick-3: 342

Straight: \$259.50

Box: \$43

Pair: \$25.50

Midday Pick-4: 4611

Straight: \$2,733.50

Box: \$227.50

Evening Pick-3: 647

Straight: \$263.50

Box: \$43.50

Pair: \$26

Evening Pick-4: 9425

Straight: \$2,712

Box: \$113

Jersey Cash 5: 8, 9, 10, 19, 25

5 of 5 pays \$63,639

4 of 5 pays \$243

3 of 5 pays \$7

NEW YORK

Midday Daily: 746

Lucky Sum: 17

Midday WinFour: 4466

Lucky Sum: 20

Evening Daily: 685

Lucky Sum: 19

Evening WinFour: 7462

Lucky Sum: 19

Lotto: Late drawing

Take-5: Late drawing

Pick 10: Late drawing

PENNSYLVANIA

Cash 5: 6, 10, 33, 38, 41

Midday Daily: 325

Midday Big 4: 9365

Midday Quinto: 89731

Evening Daily: 714

Evening Big 4: 2530

Evening Quinto: 09911

Treasure Hunt: 3, 5, 16, 19, 21

MULTISTATE

Powerball: Late drawing

FRIDAY, OCT. 18

NEW JERSEY

Midday Pick-3: 002

Straight: \$297.50

Box: \$99; Pair: \$29.50

Midday Pick-4: 5410

Straight: \$2,605; Box: \$108.50

Evening Pick-3: 227

Straight: \$206; Box: \$68.50

Pair: \$20.50

Evening Pick-4: 8797

Straight: \$2,422; Box: \$201.50

Jersey Cash 5: 4, 21, 22, 23, 31

5 of 5 pays \$72,813; 4 of 5 pays \$608; 3 of 5 pays \$11

NEW YORK

Midday Daily: 800

Lucky Sum: 8

Midday WinFour: 1532

Lucky Sum: 11

Evening Daily: 467

Lucky Sum: 17

Evening WinFour: 3093

Lucky Sum: 15

Take-5: 8, 9, 17, 24, 26

Pick 10: 3, 8, 12, 15, 17, 20, 22, 24, 29, 30, 36, 41, 46, 67, 69, 73, 74, 78, 79, 80

PENNSYLVANIA

Cash 5: 7, 12, 19, 32, 36

Midday Daily: 176

Midday Big 4: 7302

Midday Quinto: 77898

Evening Daily: 726

Evening Big 4: 2191

Evening Quinto: 17875

Treasure Hunt: 5, 7, 21, 23, 29

MULTISTATE

Mega Millions: 5, 20, 45, 48, 56; Mega Ball: 1

AIMEE

Continued from Page A1

changed what we opted to do when."

The chemotherapy shrunk the tumor considerably, Toppmeyer said.

"At first, it was big," the 39-year-old Parani said. "But after the first chemo treatment, it was not there. You could not feel it."

Parani went on to finish five months of chemotherapy treatments on July 22 and delivered her healthy girl, Paige Virginia Parani, on Aug. 23.

Up to this moment, the past year has been full of milestone events — finding a lump, moving to Florida from St. Thomas, the realization that she was pregnant, discovering the baby was a girl only to be told the next day that the lump was breast cancer, finding the right team of doctors, starting chemotherapy, ending chemotherapy, having a baby and her youngest sister's wedding. Now, the day that Parani calls the end of a chapter in this book about breast cancer had arrived.

"I am ready," she said. "I am so ready."

Up early and raring to go ... sleepily

Exhausted from getting up well before the crack of dawn — and a hungry baby at 2 a.m. — Aimee and Chris Parani made it to Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital in New Brunswick from Point Pleasant well before the 5:30 a.m. check-in. No traffic, and record time for the drive that usually takes 90 minutes.

"We got here in about 45 minutes," Chris Parani said. "Early. We were the only ones on the road."

Soon, the action began in the "quiet room" of the hospital's same day surgical suite for the "first case of the day." The Paranis joked that she out of everybody should not be placed in a "quiet room." Known for her chattiness and friendliness, Aimee Parani never comes across as quiet.

Dr. Robert Herbstman of Contemporary Plastic Surgery, with offices in Red Bank and East Brunswick, came in to "draw a little bit" and go over the details of the surgery and post-op days. Most likely, her surgery would not be "same day" and Parani would be admitted for at least one night.

"I mark out the landmarks of the surgery," he said. "Mainly where the curve is and the midline. The landmarks are different lying down than sitting up, and the marks guide us in the creation of space."

Aimee Parani called it "doodling," and Chris Parani jokingly offered the opportunity to draw a happy face. He declined.

While tired, Aimee Parani joked that at least she would be able to sleep most of the day. The surgery was expected to take five hours. Breast surgeon Laurie Kirstein came in to see her patient and said her part — the bi-



Last month, breast cancer patient Aimee Parani played with her 4-year-old son Gregory outside her parents' Point Pleasant. JASON TOWLEN/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

lateral mastectomy — would most likely take about 2½ hours, with Herbstman joining her at the operating table once "one side is done." The remainder of his reconstructive surgery will take about 1½ hours.

"Aimee is having a bilateral nipple sparing mastectomy," Kirstein said. "I will take the breast tissue out, leave the nipple in place and take out the lymph node, and margins around it. Dr. Herbstman will place in the implant, and Aimee will look like herself."

For Aimee Parani, the only time she broke down took place before the surgery. Known to have "little veins," it was hard to find one where they could insert the intravenous therapy. Telling her to "breathe," through her tears, Aimee Parani still joked and said she never took the childbirth classes.

"This will be the worst part of the day," Kirstein said.

"The only time I had a hard time was when they were trying to find a vein," Aimee Parani said. "I think that's also when it all hit me and it hit me a little hard. That's when I cried. As they got me into the OR, I was nervous because I wasn't drugged yet. I started getting up-set because they couldn't find the vein. Then, the anesthesiologist finally found a vein. I think he said, 'Here comes your cosmos. No, I think we'll give you the Grand Mariner.' Then I was out."

Aimee Parani said the whole time Kirstein and a nurse were holding her hand and telling her "It's OK."

"She was telling me that was the hardest part of the day and that she knew it was painful. She kept telling me everything looked good," she said. "From the time I got there that morning, everything went so smoothly. They were all so reassuring."

Aimee's support system

"The relatives have the hardest part of the job on the day of surgery," Kirstein said. "They will be anxious."

And they were anxious, but Aimee Parani's optimistic spirit kept the nerves at bay. Honing in on her positivity that everything would be better than fine, Chris Parani

went to the surgical waiting room after a sweet send off to his wife.

"She made it so easy," he said. "Throughout this whole thing, from chemo to surgery, she has been calm and positive. She was never fragile and in her bed. We did not have to walk on eggshells around her. We could barely take care of her as she was too busy taking care of everybody else."

Aimee Parani's parents — Paul and Millie Fraley — arrived with big sister Kim Pope. The newlyweds Jill and Randy Hamill were expected that evening from their honeymoon in Cabo San Lucas, Mexico.

Brother-in-law Pat Pope was helping man the fort and corral the children back home. He was aided by a close family friend "Great-Grandma" Gladys Metzger as well as an aunt and uncle — Kathy and Ernie Gouker — who, after hearing of the pending surgery, delayed their trip back to Florida after the wedding. A little later, Chris' parents, Kathleen and Frank Parani, joined the group to wait out the surgery.

Settled in at the waiting area, there was a lot of glancing at the constantly changing list of patient statuses — green for pending, pink for in surgery blue for in recovery and white for discharged. The screen seemed to display Aimee Parani's identification number as be green forever. Finally, around 9 a.m., it switched to pink, and Chris Parani knew the surgery was under way.

Time was spent talking about the news of the day, sharing old familiar family stories, particularly ones featuring Aimee Parani; texts were exchanged with those not present, photos of the recent wedding and honeymoon as well as a few games of solitaire were on an iPad. Though an app on his phone, Chris Parani also was able to keep tabs on their business in St. Thomas — Picasso's Coffee Bar.

Paul Fraley told of the neighbors who have rallied around Aimee Parani. One, Debbie Alfonso, herself a breast cancer survivor, has readied a

team — Our Bosom Buddies — to walk in the American Cancer Society's Making Strides Against Breast Cancer today in Point Pleasant. The family intends on walking, though Aimee Parani's participation is unsure.

"The night before the surgery, this is the neighbor who came over with a pair of pajamas for Aimee," Fraley said. "And a T-shirt from Hooters."

Breaking news

Kirstein had promised to come tell the family about Aimee Parani's condition as soon as her part of the surgery was complete. The day before, a dye was injected into Parani that would assist in finding the affected lymph node and tumor. "We will test her while she is sleeping in the operating room," Kirstein said. "If the test shows no further tumor cells, we will not take anymore and take care of it right there. This particular surgery is common for those that carry the gene for breast cancer. While Aimee's story is not common, her procedure is. It is pretty run of the mill, and that is exactly what we want."

After three hours, at noon, Kirstein appeared in the waiting room.

"We took four lymph nodes and tested them and they were negative (for cancer cells)," Kirstein said. "That is a good sign for her prognosis. We didn't find the tumor. It's gone. It went really, really well. She is stable — she is great. She responded really well, and when we got the news, a big cheer went up in the OR."

Kirstein said she left Herbstman with "one side's implant done, and it looks great."

Then, two hours later, Herbstman came to the waiting room smiling with his news.

"Everything came together really well," he said. "We used the 375 (size of implant) which gives her a nice shape. A little fuller than what she already had. It went exactly as the game plan. Dr. Kirstein was able to remove the tissue, and

See SURGERY, Page A3

Today In History

Today is Sunday, Oct. 20, the 293rd day of 2013. There are 72 days left in the year.

On this date: 1803: The U.S. Senate ratifies the Louisiana Purchase.

1903: A joint commission rules in favor of the United States in a boundary dispute between the District of Alaska and Canada.

1947: The House Un-American Activities Committee opens hear-

ings into alleged Communist influence and infiltration in the U.S. motion picture industry.

1964: The 31st president, Herbert Hoover, dies at 90.

1967: Seven men are convicted in Meridian, Miss., of violating the civil rights of three slain civil rights workers.

1968: Former first lady Jacqueline Kennedy marries Greek shipping magnate Aristotle Onassis.

HOME NEWS TRIBUNE

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