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AIMEE'S STORY

The day after they called to tell me
I was having a baby girl,
 they called to tell me
I had breast cancer.



Breast cancer survivor Aimee Parani has opted for a bilateral mastectomy and breast reconstruction. She and her family moved to her parents' Point Pleasant home from Florida while she had treatment. PHOTOS BY JASON TOWLEN/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Aimee Parani is in the homestretch of her marathon to beat breast cancer – and live the best years of her life

By Cheryl Makin :: @CherylMakin

First in a series

Aimee Parani is turning 40 this month. A milestone. More than that...a miracle. To celebrate, Aimee's husband Chris Parani is "getting her implants." Superficial? Not at all.

After undergoing five months of chemotherapy treatment for breast cancer — all done while pregnant with her second child — Aimee Parani has chosen to undergo a bilateral mastectomy and reconstructive surgery. Both surgeries are to be done this Thursday at Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital in New Brunswick.

"We know what we are doing and now are talking about getting ready to go," Aimee Parani said. "I feel ready to run a marathon and am just waiting for the

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MORE COVERAGE INSIDE

A look at services and programs of Central Jersey hospitals. **Page A7**

A calendar of upcoming Central Jersey-based breast cancer events. **Page A8**

Do celebrities' stories help or hinder breast-cancer awareness? In **Sunday Best**

Special report on women's health, featuring "Nashville" star and "The Doctors." In **USA WEEKEND**

Plus, look on **MyCentralJersey.com** for a special digital feature on related coverage starting today and throughout the week.



East Brunswick plastic surgeon Dr. Robert Herbstman, who will perform reconstruction, examines Parani.



Parani joins her 4-year-old son Gregory at play, while holding her infant daughter Paige.



Chris Parani waits with his wife, Aimee, to see East Brunswick surgeon Herbstman.

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Read more about Aimee Parani's life journey thus far, and get an update on the BRCA2 gene mutation.

A CARING COMMUNITY

A day to help others

Volunteer projects set for Central Jersey Make a Difference Day

By Bob Makin
 @ReporterBMakin

Excitement and the numbers of participants are growing for the two Central Jersey projects that each received \$5,000 grants from the Gannett Foundation, as part of the USA Weekend-sponsored Make a Difference Day.

Each is recruiting dozens of volunteers for its portion of the nation's largest day of volunteering on Oct. 26, organizers said.

North Brunswick High School will refurbish a butterfly garden that was severely damaged by superstorm Sandy and since has fallen into further disrepair, Principal Pete Clark said.

Volunteers include members of the school's environmental club, Clark said, and family and friends of Joey Rogers, a graduate who died six years ago at the age of 22 after a long battle with a genetic blood disorder called Wiskott-Aldrich Syndrome. Rogers bequeathed the funds to the school to build the garden, the principal said.

"It's a large undertaking to keep it up because it requires a lot of maintenance," Clark said.

"I'm so touched by this," added Dolly Rogers, Joey's mother, who plans to be there on Oct. 26. "I think it's wonderful. I know my son would be very, very pleased."

The volunteers will be joined by Amato Gardens, professional landscapers from neighboring South Brunswick that originally constructed the garden.

Clark also aims to recruit volunteers from the general public and to promote Make a Difference Day throughout the community.

The second project involves Middle Earth, a Somerset County-based youth-services organization. On Oct. 26, the group and the youths it serves will host a basketball game that will pit officials, police officers and youth from Bound Brook against those from Somerville, said Maria Strada, executive director of Middle Earth.

The officials will include Bound Brook Councilmen Sean Hasting, Anthony Pran-

See DAY, Page A10

An Apple today keeps virus away

Just last week, my hero (my brother, Kent) and I were talking about Apple.

No, not the fruit that you eat, but the company. My hero and I are Apple fans. Never-mind those dumb commercials about how much cheaper PCs are than Macs, how much bigger Kindles are than iPads or how many more functions an Android-type phone has compared to an iPhone. Apple products just plain are better.

As my dear friend reminds us all: "My Unk (uncle) says: You get what you pay for!" What does that mean? Well, I have worked on Apple/Mac products and PC products for more than 25 years — Apple products work better, last longer and produce better-



quality output. Period.

My hero, who at least three times a year talks to me about his stock investments, pointed out that he is making a killing with Apple stock. Hey, if you build a better mousetrap

Anyway, why am I talking about this? Well, if you haven't been paying close attention to the news lately, according to several published reports, Interbrand, which consults with companies about their public image, com-

piles a prestigious list based on financial performance of the company, the role the brand plays in influencing consumers, and how secure the brand's top money-making products are in their field.

Apple now heads that list, ending Coca-Cola's 13-year run in the top spot. According to the report, Apple's brand is estimated to be worth \$98.3 billion, a 28 percent increase over 2012, when it was No. 2 on the list. Coca-Cola's value also rose, but by only 2 percent, to \$79.2 billion.

I told you Apple is the real deal.

According to Apple's website: The company was found-

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WEATHER

AREA FIVE-DAY FORECAST

Table with 5 columns: Today, Tomorrow, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday. Each column includes a weather icon, a description (e.g., 'Mostly cloudy, slight chance of thunderstorms and rain'), and a temperature range (e.g., '76/63').

MARINE FORECAST East winds 5 to 10 knots. Waves 1 foot or less. Patchy fog in the morning with visibility 1 to 3 nautical miles.

COMFORT INDICATORS

Table with 2 columns: Sunburn Index, Air Quality, Heat Index. Values include Sunburn Index: 3, Air Quality: Moderate, Heat Index: 67° at 8 a.m., 72° at noon, 76° at 4 p.m.

TIDES

Table with 3 columns: Location (Sandy Hook, Raritan Bay), Time, and Tide Type (High/Low). Includes times for high and low tides.

SUN AND MOON

Table with 4 columns: Phase (First, Full, Last, New), Date, and Time. Includes times for sunset, sunrise, moonrise, and moonset.

ALMANAC

Table with 2 columns: Metric (e.g., New Brunswick Readings, Temperatures, Precipitation) and Value (e.g., 93 (1941), 91 (1959), 0.00").

LOTTERIES

Table listing lottery results for Saturday, Oct. 5 and Friday, Oct. 4. Includes sections for New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, and Multistate with various game names and winning numbers.

AIMEE

Continued from Page A1

surgery to put an end to this crazy chapter." This past February, one day after a blood test confirmed her 13-week in utero baby was healthy and a girl, Parani was told the lump in her breast tested positive for breast cancer. It was strongly suggested she terminate the pregnancy.

2 weeks turned into nine months, so far

Aimee, Chris and 4-year-old Gregory packed their bags for "two weeks" and drove home to New Jersey at Chris' insistence. The two are from Point Pleasant and Brick originally and both sets of parents and sibling remain in the area.

Just before the move to Florida, the Paranis lived in St. Thomas (U.S. Virgin Islands), where they own Picaso's Coffee Bar. The couple had met in New Jersey, moved to St. Thomas in 2007 and married there in 2009. The move to Florida was for Gregory's schooling.

The thought of terminating the pregnancy was devastating for the couple. "The doctor's office in Florida told us that they didn't think that I would be able to carry the baby, so I might want to think of terminating the pregnancy," she said.

With a referral to the Rutgers Cancer Institute of New Jersey in New Brunswick, Parani was placed in the hands of Dr. Deborah Toppmeyer.

"We arrived for our meeting at the Cancer Institute and Dr. Toppmeyer came in and said, 'I just came from a meeting with the oncologists, surgeons, radiologists and high-risk doctors and this is what we are going to do.' And she laid out a plan to cure my breast cancer and keep our baby safe," Aimee Parani said.

Two weeks in New Jersey turned into months as she underwent chemotherapy for the breast cancer. Instead of surgery first, then chemotherapy and radiation, Toppmeyer put Aimee on a regimen of six rounds of chemotherapy every three weeks aimed at-

ing in early July. Due to two episodes of low white blood counts, the chemotherapy had to be delayed. She completed the chemo regimen on July 22.

"With this therapy there would be no difference in her outcome," Toppmeyer said. "We did chemo up front to shrink her tumor. What we did to help her pregnancy in no way altered her prognosis or compromised her in any way. Previously, Aimee had been told she may need a therapeutic abortion. That was not the case."

On Aug. 23 at 1:42 a.m. at RWJUH, with the help and guidance of high-risk obstetrician Dr. Todd Rosen of Robert Wood Johnson Medical Group, Paige Virginia Parani was born weighing 6 pounds, 1 ounce and, most importantly, healthy.

"We trusted them completely," said Aimee Parani, whose labor was induced. "Paige had a full head of hair. And I had none. To me, that was a great sign. She is our miracle."

Healthy baby, now healthy Aimee

All during the months of breast cancer treatment, Aimee's focus was not on herself, but on her baby. Now, it was time for the attention to turn to Aimee's future. With the discovery that she carried the BRCA2 gene mutation, Aimee knew surgery lay ahead.

"The Cancer Institute was able to perform a lab test of my biopsy to confirm that I was BRCA positive," she said. "To me, that confirmed I would be getting a double mastectomy. I do not want to go through this again."

According to the National Cancer Institute, specific inherited mutations in the BRCA1 and BRCA2 genes increase the risk of female breast and ovarian cancers, and they have been associated with increased risks of several additional types of cancer.

Recently, Angelina Jolie made headlines with the announcement that she was BRCA1 positive and had opted for a preventative double mastectomy. Jolie's mother, actress Marcheline Bertrand, had breast cancer and died from ovarian cancer at the age of 56, while her maternal grandmother had ovarian cancer and died aged 45.

Like Jolie, Aimee Parani intends to undergo a preventative oophorectomy — the surgical removal of the ovaries — as she still has a high risk of developing ovarian cancer.

The bilateral mastectomy is scheduled for Thursday at Robert Wood University Hospital in New Brunswick. Rutgers Cancer Institute of New Jersey breast surgeon Dr. Laurie Kirstein is in charge of the mastectomy and Dr. Robert Herbstman of Contemporary Plastic Surgery in East Brunswick performing

the reconstructive surgery.

"Aimee will be having a bilateral, nipple sparing mastectomy," Kirstein said. "The day before, I will give her an injection that will allow us to find the lymph node that is affected. That day, Dr. Herbstman will make marks on her breast on the intermammary fold. During the surgery, I will take the breast tissue out and leave the nipple in place. I will take out the lymph node and a margin around it. Dr. Herbstman will do the implant procedure and Aimee will look like herself."

As for the affected lymph node, that will be removed and tested while Parani is sleeping, Kirstein said.

"If there are no tumor cells, we will not take any more," Kirstein said.

Kirstein said that the type of surgery that Parani will undergo is "common for those that carry the gene for breast cancer."

"While Aimee's story is not common, her procedure is," Kirstein said. "It is not as common to present with breast cancer during pregnancy. We see a handful of patients every year. She has been through a lot."

Reconstructive surgery

Herbstman, who has offices in Red Bank and East Brunswick, met the Paranis at a first consult in early September. Two weeks before the planned surgery, he met with them again to complete necessary paperwork, size Aimee Parani and discuss pre- and post-operative care as well as the surgery itself.

"Dr. Kirstein will be creating a space between the two muscle levels by removing the breast gland. She will spare the nipple," Herbstman said. "In the submuscular space under the pectoral muscle, I will be using an implant to make the breast mound."

Parani opted for the Natrelle 410 Shaped Gel implants, a newer style that Herbstman considers a more stable implant.

"It keeps its shape better," said Herbstman, who noted that other companies make comparable implants as well. "These are firmer feeling and have a nice slope. The prior generation was more squishy and collapsible. These are not liquids. We call these the gummy bear implants."

At the consultation, Herbstman explained that he is looking at the size and shape of Parani's breasts to determine the implant brand and size in terms of volume. He measured in diameter of the base of the breast, the height and projection of the breast.

"Measurements determine what is a good fit," Herbstman said. "We do not want the size of the implants to cause too much tension on closure. For Aimee, we want her

breasts back to normal. We will fill out the space between her cleavage and add more contour."

In Parani's situation, Herbstman does not believe she will need "expanders," that would extend the time by months that she would need for the completion of the reconstructive surgery. Because of her size and condition, her surgery can most likely be completed in one day.

"If we needed to create space, I would have to insert sterile sizers to get her a better fit," Herbstman said. "The space is determined by the footprint of the breast. We match that footprint precisely. But, we have to see the skin that we have to deal with and sometimes, we have to create space and add a tissue graft to get the room we need. For larger patients, it is better to do this surgery in two steps."

It is the anatomy of the patient that often determines the implant, Herbstman said.

"Anatomy dictates size of the implant we use," he said. "The variable is the 'oopmh' we want to create."

Herbstman explained that Parani's situation is a unique one, given her recent pregnancy. Parani is not breastfeeding and is not lactating.

"After pregnancy, if the breasts are producing milk and we need to do this surgery, that can present a problem," he said. "Breast milk is not sterile. There is an increased chance of infection. I do not recommend this in dealing with lactating patients."

According to Parani, her bra size is generally a 34B. Herbstman said she would most likely remain the same, but "perhaps a little fuller."

"We are not going to make her all that different," he said. "There will be more volume distributed in more area. In the operating room, we weigh the breast tissue that is removed and that is in grams."

Prior to the surgery, Herbstman advised Parani that she should participate in a regimen of homeopathic nutritional supplements, including herbs, vitamins and minerals, and antiseptic cleansing to prep the breast and underarm area.

"I feel now we are in the home stretch," Parani said. "I just want to get back to our regular life."

Editor's note: This is the first in a series of stories documenting Aimee Parani's experiences with breast cancer. We will be with her during the 20th annual Race for the Cure today in Jackson, for a story to be published in Tuesday's editions. We also will update readers on her surgery experiences and recovery progress in subsequent installments.

Staff Writer Cheryl Makin: 732-565-7256; cmakin@njpressmedia.com

Today in History

Today is Sunday, Oct. 6, the 279th day of 2013. There are 86 days left in the year.

- On this date: 1683: Thirteen families from Krefeld, Germany, arrive in Philadelphia to begin German town, one of America's oldest settlements. 1927: The era of talking pictures arrives with the opening of "The Jazz Singer," starring Al Jolson, a movie that features both silent and

sound-synchronized sequences.

1939: As resistance in Poland crumbles, Adolf Hitler delivers a speech blaming the Poles for the Nazi-Soviet invasion of their country.

2008: As Wall Street reels and global markets plunge, President George W. Bush says the U.S. economy is going to be "just fine" in the long run, but cautions that the massive rescue plan will take time to work.

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