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St. Albert Gazette

City woman recognized for fight against ovarian cancer

Award to be presented at charity's annual walk

By: Scott Hayes

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Liza Sunley

Preview

Ovarian Cancer Canada's Walk of Hope

Sunday, Sept. 9

10 a.m. start

2.5 or 5-km walk

Sir Wilfrid Laurier Park

Visit www.ovariancanada.org for more information, to register or to donate.

A rare national honour was recently bestowed on St. Albert's Liza Sunley, otherwise known as 'the face of ovarian

cancer in Edmonton.'

Sunley was announced as the recipient of the Peggy Truscott Award of Hope, given out by Ovarian Cancer Canada. The prestigious award is based on dedicated volunteerism, and the local woman is an apt choice. She has volunteered for the organization's annual Walk of Hope since it first started in Edmonton seven years ago, but she first got involved the year after she was diagnosed.

The 38-year-old consultant discovered that she had ovarian cancer accidentally after one workout ten years ago. She had not been feeling her best, but didn't think much of it until she felt a lump in her abdomen while doing some sit-ups.

"I thought that didn't seem normal but I wasn't normally pressing around there so I didn't know. After a couple of weeks, I thought I should really get this checked," she said, adding, "Looking back I actually had a lot of symptoms. They're so subtle."

"They don't really know the cause for me. For some people, it's genetics but for most it seems to be a little more random," she remarked, explaining why the fundraiser has sparked such a close-knit community. "It's a relatively rare type of cancer but the problem with it is it's the most deadly for women."

She said that she was lucky to have discovered it at such an early stage.

"There's no screening. There's no early detection. It's a matter of recognizing what the symptoms are and then following up with physicians."

"It's not easy to say 'That's a clear symptom of ovarian cancer.' A lot of them tend to be gastrointestinal so doctors will tend to work them up for other kinds of tests. It's very simple to go in for an ultrasound to rule [ovarian cancer] out. The vast majority of people are diagnosed in late stages."

She went on to emphasize that the symptoms are "very, very vague." According to Ovarian Cancer Canada's website at www.ovariancanada.org (<http://www.ovariancanada.org>), the symptoms are "non-specific and can be mistakenly attributed to other causes." They include abdominal swelling or bloating, pelvic discomfort or heaviness, back or abdominal pain, digestive upset (including gas, nausea and indigestion), and menstrual irregularities.

The Peggy Truscott Award is named eponymously after the Ontario woman who was diagnosed with ovarian cancer in 1999. The next year, she started volunteering with the organization, serving on the board of directors and eventually starting the fundraising walk in Toronto in September 2002. The Walk of Hope has since grown to include locations all across the country.

Sunley said that she is proud to get the award.

"It's quite an honour," she stated. "I have a lot of respect for Peggy Truscott. It's just nice to be recognized when you do this kind of thing."

Sunley is the tenth recipient and only the second Albertan to win after Gail Companion from Gladys Ridge won in 2007. She will receive her stained glass trophy at the Edmonton walk on Sunday, Sept. 9 at Laurier Park. The event sees participation of almost 1,000 walkers.
