

Our 2018 Honoree...Dawn Sanford

Dawn Sanford was born at Vassar Hospital in 1962 and has lived in our area her whole life. She graduated from Roy C. Ketcham High School and Dutchess Community College. Dawn commuted to Manhattan for 12 years to her job with a Swiss investment company, then met and married her husband, Thomas. They lived in Hyde Park raising their two children, Mitchell and Farrah until they moved to their current home in LaGrange. Mitchell is 19 and a student at SUNY Cortland, while Farrah, 18, is in her senior year in high school. Dawn's extended family includes many beloved animals. A self-professed "animal lover," these furry friends are so important to her.

Dawn was a stay-at-home mom but has now been working in special education for BOCES for the past 10 years. She is currently in the classroom at Vail Farm Elementary in the Arlington School District. This kind of work speaks to Dawn's natural urge to help people. Friends would describe her as always willing to reach out to someone no matter the need. Dawn is sensitive, outgoing and positive. She loves antiquing and gardening. She loves taking long walks but also does not mind sitting oceanside with a margarita in hand.

On December 14, 2007, Dawn went to the doctor for a routine mammogram. She had no family history at the time. After 2 hours of scans, waiting, more scans and more waiting, the tech revealed to her that he was pretty sure she had breast cancer. That long drive home, alone, and the subsequent few weeks before her confirmed diagnosis of stage one Ductal Carcinoma (DCIS) breast cancer were the scariest times Dawn said she has endured in this whole experience. Once she received the confirmed diagnosis, Dawn settled in. She felt she was in good hands with her doctors, Dr. Eugene Koloski and Dr. Celestino Sepulveda, and had the support of her friends and family, so she saw fit to move forward positively.

Dawn underwent surgery for a bilateral mastectomy in January 2008 and then 2 surgeries for reconstruction, all at Vassar Brothers Medical Center. She was lucky to not need any further treatment like radiation or chemo; however, a few years later, due to a problem with an implant, she endured another complete reconstruction with 2 more surgeries. Today, Dawn continues with biannual bloodwork and takes Tamoxifen to keep her levels regulated.

Dawn is so very grateful to her husband and children as well as her own beloved Mom, who sadly passed away a few short month ago, her in-laws, Ray and Marie Sanford who she says were "phenomenal" during her treatment. She also could not have gotten through this without her dear friend Bernadette. The St. Kateri Parish community and Knights of Columbus were both also a huge help to her and her family providing food, donations and kind visits. Dawn would like to thank all of these wonderful people for all they did for her.

In addition, a group of friends rallied around Dawn in quite a unique way by forming a basketball team to play with and for her at Hoops for Hope 9 years ago. "Dawn's Dunkers" has been one of our longest standing teams at our tournament playing each year since. Dawn actually played with the team the first year, but she recalls that her somewhat "competitive" teammates may have felt she was better off in the stands than on the court! 😊 Dawn would love to thank the team and especially her dear friend, Kelly Robin who, with her family, nominated her for this honor and who year after year organizes this group of women and supporters in her name!

According to Kelly Robin, "All breast cancer patients are fighters, as we all know, but Dawn is very special to us! She didn't complain; she really didn't even want anyone to know what she was going through. Her selflessness and perseverance were an example for all of us. She continued to be the best mom, wife, daughter and friend she could throughout. Her quiet courage and determination is what inspires all of us to play for her every year! (Even as we are much older, in horrible shape and slightly delicate)."

But Hoops for Hope is not her only connection to Miles of Hope. Dawn reveals one special moment she had 10 years ago just before her surgery. Her dear friend, Cristia Besko, upon hearing of Dawn's diagnosis, wanted her to meet a friend of hers who was a survivor. She thought it would be good to talk with someone who knew what she was going through. That friend was Dana Effron, breast cancer Survivor and Co-Founder of Miles of Hope. Dawn and Dana met for coffee at Starbucks in just prior to her surgery and chatted about what Dawn could expect, what would lie ahead. Dana was a support to Dawn at such a critical time and this meeting means so much to Dawn to this day.

Dawn is now a 10-year survivor of breast cancer. Immediately after her initial surgery, she found a place for this experience and feels it is at rest. She has moved on in her life and lives it fully and lovingly. She acknowledges that as a wife and mother, your family can often think of you as indestructible. Having cancer upset that view but Dawn's attitude and endurance was a reminder that while one can crack or break a bit, you can still be molded back together. It is the love and support of family, friends and community, along with your own positive attitude that does the rebuilding. As a family, this experience made the Sanfords stronger.

Dawn would like to share some words spoken to her years ago that she would like to pass along to those recently diagnosed, to survivors and their loved ones, to those who are just having a tough time in general:

"Life may throw hurdles in our path, we just have to keep going full speed ahead, looking inside ourselves for the courage to leap over them and never look back. God Bless."

We present to you, Dawn Sanford, our 2018 Hoops for Hope Honoree.