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## Vicki Rosenberg's battle:

# *Cancer survivor becomes advocate*

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*Sherburn*

Vicki Rosenberg admits she's always had a passion for educating people about health. So it shouldn't be surprising she has found her recent battle with ovarian cancer as an opportunity to inform.

"I know that sounds odd, looking at cancer as an opportunity," Rosenberg said. "But it really has been, because doors have opened for me, and people look at you differently when you've had cancer. There's an empathy in their hearts, but they don't really know what to say to you ... I've tried to take that opportunity to educate and enlighten, because we're in a community that genuinely cares about people."

Rosenberg was diagnosed last summer with ovarian cancer after feeling just a few odd symptoms.

"I just had this feeling like I was a little gassy," she said. "My doctors didn't think it was a big deal."

But Rosenberg, whose family has a history of cancer, pursued it and finally was on the right track when she was called back to the doctor's office because of an abnormal mammogram. Other tests pointed to ovarian cancer.

"I already had the growths on my ovaries and it spread to other organs such as my bladder," Rosenberg said. "If I had waited until I experienced more severe symptoms, I probably wouldn't have made it. That's why they call ovarian cancer the silent cancer."

Rosenberg was caught in time, but still had to go through chemotherapy.

"It really wasn't that bad; I was still able to keep going," she said. "You have to have hope and learn, because it's fear of the unknown that makes people more anxious."

It was during this time that Rosenberg's spirit was tested.

"I was getting ready to start a new job," she said. "During the job interview, I had hair and when I started working, I had no hair. I really realized what hair says about someone during that time."

But Rosenberg was able to rely on her sense of humor to get her through the tough days.

"At Thanksgiving, I knew it was going to be tough with the whole family there," she said. "So I put on this blonde wig, and I've always had dark hair, and we all got a good laugh out of it. The

laughter builds bridges and it makes it easier if everyone is laughing along with you; it feels more comfortable."

She also found herself in a similar situation at her new job.

"I work with health education at the Madelia hospital," she said. "I was introduced to several board members while I had no hair, and several were senior men who were bald. So after talking for a few minutes I could tell they were curious, so I said, 'I'm glad hair isn't a prerequisite here.' So we all laughed and it was a good ice-breaker."

Rosenberg now has her own dark hair back, and still has frequent visits to Mayo Clinic, but she remains a strong advocate for cancer survivors.

"I spoke at the Relay For Life in Jackson County," she said. "I said there were four F's that I needed to get through it: faith, family, friends and fun. Another important thing that really helped me was a positive attitude, because I feel that really contributed. But I couldn't have had that positive attitude without those four F's."

Along with educating people through her own personal story, Rosenberg is raising funds and awareness for cancer research by selling bracelets and pins that pertain to cancer survivors and the different types of cancer.

"In the past six months, I've sold about \$4,000 worth of bracelets for cancer research," she said. "They make good gifts and are good conversation starters. In fact, I sold \$130 in one day in Rochester."

Rosenberg also has been interviewed by Good Housekeeping, although her story was not published.

"They didn't think my story was 'dramatic enough,'" she said. "My doctor was really mad when she heard that ... They ended up running one woman's story who had a tumor the size of a football. But that's a rare case; the fact that ovarian cancer is so subtle is what women need to be aware of."

Rosenberg is also part of a clinical research group. Recently, a vaccine was created that could prevent cervical cancer, and scientists hope to create a vaccine for both breast and ovarian cancer.

"It's exciting, because it's kind of a cool way that someone from small town USA can play a major role," Rosenberg said.