



Eisenhower's Dr. John Cutrone shows Selby Dunham, founder of BIGHORN BAM, some of the state-of-the-art breast cancer technology purchased with BAM's \$2.3 million donation. PAT LASSY/SPECIAL TO THE DESERT SUN

# An inside look at fighting cancer

By Betty Francis

Special To The Desert Sun

For more than 17 years, I've been preaching "Show-Them-Where-The-Money-Goes" to our more than 800 local charities. But I was truly blown away last week during a luncheon at Eisenhower Medical Center's Lucy Curci Cancer Center in Rancho Mirage.

Nearly a dozen members of the BIGHORN BAM (Behind A Miracle) fundraising group were treated to an "insider's look" at a breast cancer tumor board and new equipment at the Eisenhower Schnitzer/Novack Breast Center — the main beneficiary of BIGHORN BAM'S \$2.3 million in fundraising for Eisenhower.

Betty Wolf, vice president of the Eisenhower Medical Center Foundation, arranged the catered lunch, which was held in a medium-sized conference room on the first floor of the cancer center.

What made this particular luncheon so unique was that it served multiple purposes.

For Eisenhower, the luncheon was a perfect opportunity to show BAM the benefits of a multi-disciplinary team approach through its breast cancer tumor board. One of eight tumor boards held at Eisenhower, the breast cancer tumor board is comprised of physicians in various disciplines including medical oncology, radiology, pathology, surgery and more, who volunteer their time twice a month to discuss each and every breast cancer patient seen at Eisenhower.

The luncheon also served as a "thank you" to the members of BAM, who have supported the breast center through their generous donations year after year, enabling it to obtain the most state-of-the-art equipment for the detection and treatment of breast cancer, rivaling some of the nation's top breast centers.

Dr. John Cutrone, a

## EISENHOWER SCHNITZER/NOVACK BREAST CENTER

**INFORMATION:** To learn more about the Eisenhower Schnitzer/Novack Breast Center visit [emc.org/breast](http://emc.org/breast). To participate in a clinical trial call (760) 837-8034. BIGHORN BAM (BEHIND A MIRACLE)

**INFORMATION:** To join or volunteer call (760) 610-8218 or go to [www.bighornbam.com](http://www.bighornbam.com).

board-certified radiologist and medical director of the breast center and fellow breast radiologist Dr. Deborah Rubin, led the tumor board, showing actual mammogram's, ultrasounds, nuclear scans and MRI scans of former breast cancer patients (with all names and identification meticulously removed to ensure patient privacy).

The other specialists offered their opinions regarding diagnosis and treatment, taking into consideration how issues such as diabetes, arthritis, weight, gynecologic conditions, a patient's age, family history and lifestyle, might factor into the patient's current condition. The doctors were respectful of one another, but strong and clear in their convictions.

As onlookers, BAM members were clearly thinking: "This is the kind of team I want on my side!"

## AMAZING ADVANCES

"This new diagnostic equipment is some of the most advanced in the country," said Lilli Mandelk, MS, chief administrative officer of the cancer center, who emotionally thanked the individual fundraisers from BIGHORN BAM, which included Selby and Curt Dunham, Mel Gordon, Barbara Stewart, Sharon Kimbell, Debra Aarthur, Sue Takai-Nathan, Donna Able and Theresa Maggio.

The star of this show, made possible through BAM's incredible generosity, was the Seno-Bright® Contrast-Enhanced Spectral Mammography (CESM) from GE Healthcare.

CESM is a highly advanced, state-of-the-art diagnostic tool, which not

only detects minute cancers, but greatly reduces the waiting time between detection and diagnosis.

## FAT IS GOOD

Cutrone explained that all breasts are as individual as fingerprints and generally fall into one of two categories: fat or dense, regardless of their size. Only a mammogram or sonogram can determine the difference. Mammograms are easier to interpret on fatty breasts because cancers are easier to see. The CESM can detect cancer cells in dense breasts, as well as in difficult-to-find areas such as close to the chest muscle, which older equipment might miss.

"The next time you have a mammogram, ask your doctor to tell you which type of breast you have, fat or dense," he said. "Knowing which type you have can be helpful when you have a concern."

## ATTENTION SNOWBIRDS

Wolf, the event's originator along with Dunham, said, "We are seeing more and more women from New York, Chicago and other snowbird areas who schedule their annual mammograms here. They say our process is faster, easier and far more comfortable than the medical equipment in their home state."

## DOCTOR'S ADVICE

"Don't put off getting your annual screening mammogram," said Cutrone. "Some of the cancers you saw on the screen today were in women over the age of 80, and some were in their 30s and 40s with absolutely no family history of cancer." He



Surgeon Peter Schulz, points to cancer cells in a mammogram during the tumor board meeting observed by Bighorn BAM. PAT LASSY/SPECIAL TO THE DESERT SUN



Members of Bighorn BAM charity (row left) observe a tumor board session of physicians and technicians (group right). Mammograms of anonymous breast cancer patients are projected on screen. PAT LASSY/SPECIAL TO THE DESERT SUN

added, "Don't put it off, for even one year. The earlier we catch it, the better the outcome. Even six months can make a difference."

Surgeon Peter Schultz, concurred with his fellow panelists. "We must all remember the importance of communication. Sometimes we might say things that patients could misunderstand, which might add to their anxiety. All of us do our best to listen carefully to our patients' questions and concerns and then provide clear, tangible answers and that will help alleviate that anxiety."

Additional points made by Mandelk and the physician experts included:

» You don't have to come to the main Eisenhower campus for your

mammogram. Eisenhower Schnitzer/Novack Breast Center has three locations in Rancho Mirage, Palm Springs and La Quinta.

» The breast center performs more than 23,000 breast procedures a year, including more than 16,000 mammograms.

» One percent of our breast cancer patients are men.

» Eisenhower offers opportunities for patients to take part in clinical trials which is just one of the aspects of the advanced care that the center offers.

## HOW BAM DID IT

The residents of Bighorn Golf Club have always given generously to local charities, both individually and through

their annual kick-off golf tournament.

But in January 2008 one Bighorn resident named Selby Dunham, who is now a five-year breast cancer survivor, decided to "give back" to the Eisenhower Lucy Curci Cancer Center as a thank you for the care and support she and her family received there. She contacted Wolf and they formulated a plan.

As a result, Dunham founded BIGHORN BAM (Behind A Miracle), a prophetic name, because BAM has now raised more than \$2.3 million for state-of-the-art breast cancer diagnosis and treatment at the Eisenhower Schnitzer/Novack Breast Center and BIGHORN Radiation Oncology Center.

How's that for a miracle?