



Couple shines light on cancer awareness

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By [Scott Bandle](#)

Beverly Bess has fought a long battle with cancer. She and her husband, Rudy, now want to use her experiences to help the public.

The Hazelwood couple recently started the Hope Light Foundation to raise awareness of cancer and provide needed information.

"Information is vital," said Beverly, 60. "People don't want to talk about cancer. That's a dangerous attitude. The earlier you discover it, the faster you can deal with it."



[David Kennedy](#) photo - Hazelwood residents Rudy and Beverly Bess recently started the Hope Light Foundation to provide information on cancer prevention and treatment. Beverly is in remission after three bouts with the disease.

She credits a proactive stance with helping her survive two bouts of breast cancer and a recent bout of ovarian cancer. After surgery and chemotherapy, Bess is in total remission.

"I'm a fighter and I don't quit," she said. "You know your body, and you know when something is wrong. I went to the doctors myself and discussed it."

Beverly found lumps in her breasts in 1983 and 1996 through self-examination. Chronic back pain helped alert her to ovarian cancer in 2003.

Persistence is one key, Beverly said. With the ovarian cancer, her doctors couldn't determine what was wrong. One told her it was her age. But she kept pushing for tests until the cancer was discovered.

"I'm not mad at my doctors," she said. "The test results would come back negative. I just knew something was wrong."

Following Beverly's experience, the couple started the Hope Light Foundation. Rudy, 62, retired in 2006 after 36 years with the Boeing Co. He now spends all of his free time working for the foundation, which provides information on cancer symptoms, screening tests, self-exams and prevention programs.

"We've both lost friends and relatives to cancer," Rudy said. "You may not always be cured, but you have a better chance if you know the symptoms."

The couple, married for 42 years, will take the foundation's work to the Southern Illinois area. Both are from Metropolis, Ill., where the foundation's center will be built.

The Besses have chosen to focus their efforts on 34 counties in southern Illinois because of some sobering findings in a recent study.

The report, compiled by Rudy, revealed that Southern Illinois has the state's lowest percentage of early cancer diagnosis, highest cancer mortality rate, highest new cancer rate, highest percentage of people without health insurance and a shortage of health professionals.

Although the Besses are concentrating on Illinois, they want everyone to know about cancer prevention.

"So many ladies don't want to hear about it," Beverly said. "Young girls say cancer can't happen to them. Well, it can. I was taking chemotherapy with a 12-year-old and a 16-year-old."

Despite Beverly's brushes with cancer, the couple has managed to live a full and enjoyable life. Over the years, they have traveled much of North America taking pictures of lighthouses. Rudy wrote a book and produced a compact disc on the subject.

Beverly said her medical experiences have provided her with a positive attitude toward life.

"It makes you stronger, but it also makes you appreciate each day," she said.

For information on the foundation, call 838-4959 or visit the Web site at <http://www.hopelightproject.com>.

Cancer awareness tips

- Be knowledgeable of cancer symptoms - Do your homework early
- Know your family history of cancer types - Risk of cancer is influenced by genes inherited from parents
- Document suspect cancer symptoms and family cancers for discussion with your physician or oncologist
- Maintain routine checkups - A valuable tool to detect cancers in early stages
- Perform self exams - Early tumor detection can lead to a cure
- Be aware of screening tests - May detect cancer before symptoms or tumors occur
- Keep health records - Request copies of lab tests, CT scans, MRI's and ultrasounds
- Listen to your body - Know your body norms
- Practice prevention - Easier and more effective than cancer treatment
- Take ownership - It's your body
- Take action - Seek medical attention immediately at the first sign of a cancer symptom - It could save your life

Source: The Hope Light Foundation

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