

SPECIAL REPORT

Ann Haney is president and CEO of the Breast Cancer Recovery Foundation Inc., which she founded in 1997. A breast cancer survivor, she is currently undergoing treatment for a cancer recurrence. This interview took place in July.

Madison Magazine: The Breast Cancer Recovery Foundation was your vision. When did you start thinking about this kind of recovery program?

Ann Haney: I was state Health Officer, and we won a grant from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to do breast cancer and cervical cancer screening all over the state. I met a lot of women who worked with or had breast cancer and started learning about the disease. So I was telling (husband) Jim one night – as we were sitting at our Lake Superior cabin, sipping a glass of wine and watching the sun set – how breast cancer is a different kind of animal because of the loss of feminine identity and what it does to your mind. I just couldn't help but think that since it is recognized as a very different disease, maybe recovery from it requires more than we were doing. Being on Lake Superior, being in nature and practically in the wilderness, this gave me the idea of doing a retreat —of getting away.

MM: Did you approach potential funders with the idea?

AH: Not then, I just began talking to people about it, asking if I ever did get it started, would you be interested in helping? I probably talked to 100 women.

MM: Were you diagnosed at this time?

AH: Not yet. I had left the state and



was just settling into my job with Dean Health System...And then, boom, I get diagnosed with breast cancer.

MM: Did you find a lump?

AH: I was going in for my regular mammography. I always had lumpy breasts, but I told the technician, "I think this area feels different and it hurts." She said, "OK," she wanted to make sure she got exactly the right picture, and she was going to have the radiologist read it and tell him what my concerns were.

When she came back and said, "just to make sure I need to take six more on your left side," I knew I had it.

MM: How old were you?

AH: Forty-seven. And I'd only been with Dean six months...But they were totally helpful.

MM: So that's when you started thinking about the retreats again?

AH: I remember sitting at my desk one day, nauseated and tired from the chemotherapy, and Nancy Johnson, a friend who still works at American Family, called. She was on the board of the Madeline Island Music Camp and they had this facility up there that was used only six weeks out of the year, and they were looking for other charitable organizations that wouldn't tear the place apart to rent it.

MM: Did you jump at the chance?

AH: I said, "(Yes)" but I was so sick I told her I didn't know if I was going to be able to drive home, let alone start a whole foundation. She just said, "Sure you are, get some sleep, I'll help you, Patty (Helm) will help you," and we were on our way.

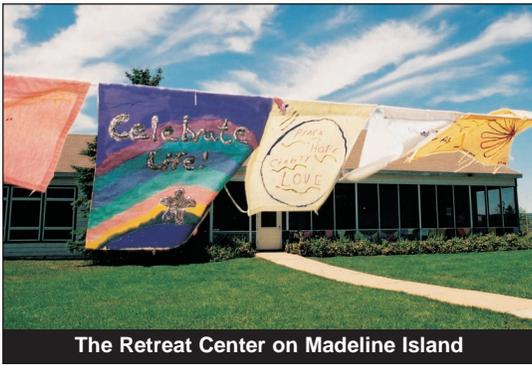
MM: So who came aboard at the beginning?

AH: Certainly Dean. We

got our legal help from them, including a pro bono lawyer to draw up our articles, bylaws and 501(c)(3) application. They asked Grant Thornton to set up our accounting system. Dean was the first to donate \$50,000 for two years, and they still donate; they have been so supportive. But they wanted us to be independent, so I started fundraising.

MM: Did you know how?

AH: Remember how I lost two campaigns running for Congress? Okay, what I won out of that whole thing was good experience. I met good people, and I learned how to fundraise. There's a reason for everything, and I think I wasn't meant to go to Congress. I was meant to learn how to fundraise so I could fund 80 percent of our women who come to Infinite Boundaries.



The Retreat Center on Madeline Island

MM: How else has a diagnosis of cancer changed your life?

AH: When women first get diagnosed with breast cancer, it's horrifying, it's life threatening. You try to get on top of it, fight it, get that survivor attitude and work at it with confidence – and you go on. With reoccurrence, it really stops you in your tracks.



The kayaking group at Infinite Boundaries

MM: Is that where you are with your reoccurrence?

AH: No. You learn the attitude of reconstruction, of putting your life back together in the way that you want it. That is the opportunity in breast cancer and reoccurrence. The only way to grow is in depth, or upward, you might say. You make decisions like, "On what things am I going to spend my time today?" And, "How can I best use these moments?" It's not like you lost those moments doing things you didn't want to do. It's one of the many wonderful gifts. In the workday world that you live in, you say, "Ohmigod, it's finally Friday!" I don't know what day it is. I know when I'm having a really good day. A good day is when I can call Lands' End and set up an appointment to go raise money for the foundation.

MM: Lands' End has supported you from the start, right?

AH: Yes, at an amazing \$100,000 over the first three years ... They'd never had a small upstart organization

ask them for \$100,000 before, but they gave it to the foundation. They continue to give us \$25,000 a year.

MM: You said there were "many wonderful gifts" that come with having cancer. This can be a difficult concept.

AH: One of the gifts cancer left me is I lost the use of my left hand. I can't key (type). Dean immediately told me they were trying to get our doctors to dictate into a voice-

automated computer, and they wanted to set me up with one, and I could test drive it for them... Everyone said it takes about two months to train the computer to read your voice, and I was thinking, "My God, I'm going to have to do this for two months." But...

being a former English teacher, I enunciate clearly and say things right. It turns out I trained the thing in two days! No one could believe it. This was a gift.

MM: What do you look forward to most at the Madeline Island retreat?

AH: ... (O)ne of my favorite parts is the last evening. After dinner as the sun goes down, we take them out on Lake Superior for our "letting go" ceremony. We ask them to bring along an item from nature that represents what they need to leave here, and what they'll throw into the water and leave behind. I

thought at first that I would see the rocks or the flowers they toss represent their breasts. What really happens is we see a lot of failed relationships going into the water, a lot of jobs and obligations. What really happens at retreat are things that can't happen otherwise. These are women who have been giving, giving, giving – who lead very complex lives. Our boys fished. Do you know what you do when you take kids fishing? You spend the entire time trying to unknot their fishing lines. Well, this is how complicated these women's lives are, like webs of knotted fishing line. We provide an environment where they can sort things through, where they can handle the physical demands. We take them into a new space and we talk about the big issues, like trust, anger and fear. Their food is prepared, their beds are made. It's not luxury, but it's what they need at the time; everything to be done just for them.

Jenifer Winiger is the publisher of *Madison Magazine*

The Breast Cancer Recovery Foundation

Where the healing begins

BY HEATHER MORGAN

Four years after Ann Haney founded the Breast Cancer Recovery Foundation, the organization is going strong, forging collaborative relationships with health care providers and employers, and helping women regain their inner spirit after breast cancer treatment.

Though Haney is currently fighting a reoccurrence of her own breast cancer, the foundation has ambitious short-term and long-term goals, according to BCRF Vice President Sue Abitz. "We don't plan to lose (Haney) any time soon, but the program has grown beyond her," Abitz says.

Through its flagship program, Infinite Boundaries, the BCRF offers four-day wellness retreats for women living with breast cancer. Often held on Madeline Island in Lake Superior, the retreats encourage women to explore their emotional response to the disease and to try new physical and creative challenges, such as kayaking, hiking and Native American crafts. Scholarships are available.

The foundation also offers a "Winter Series" of one-day educational seminars. On Nov. 1, the BCRF will sponsor its second annual "Sharing the Knowledge" conference, featuring symposia and lectures designed for both medical professionals and breast cancer survivors. The conference, which is free of charge and will likely attract 300–400 people, will feature keynote speaker Dr. Jimmie Holland, chair of the department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences at Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center in New York. One of the founders in the field of psycho-oncology, Holland will discuss the influence of the mind on cancer progression and quality of life.

In its own collaborative research project, the BCRF is trying to qualify the psychosocial changes in women who attend Infinite Boundaries retreats. With financial assistance from the

Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, the University of Wisconsin's HealthEmotions Research Institute is surveying breast cancer survivors before, immediately after and several months after attending the retreats. "It's not anecdotal anymore," Abitz says. "We can say, 'We have research here, this really works.'"

In many ways, BCRF has already proven itself. The world-renowned M.D. Anderson Cancer Center in Houston has given the foundation its stamp of approval by helping put on the November Infinite Boundaries retreat. "We're really excited about this because they realize this is a program

that is transformational. It changes people's lives," Abitz says.

BCRF is also hoping to build more relationships with employer groups such as WEA Trust and Lands End, one of the foundation's first sponsors. "They realize their employees who go to our program go back to work healthier ... more productive," Abitz says.

Also in the future, the BCRF will continue working with the Wisconsin Women's Health Foundation, which was formed by cancer survivor and former Wisconsin first lady Sue Ann Thompson. Because Thompson's foundation addresses breast cancer as one of its six key issues, the staffs and boards

of directors of the two foundations talk regularly to make sure their efforts complement each other. The foundations focus on different aspects of the disease; the Women's Health Foundation deals mainly with prevention, and the BCRF concentrates on women after diagnosis.

"We've always been allies and kind of partners in what we do," says Tommi Thompson, director of finance and development for the Women's Health Foundation and daughter of Sue Ann. "In some ways, it's where we stop that they (BCRF) begin."

Heather Morgan is a freelance writer based in Madison.