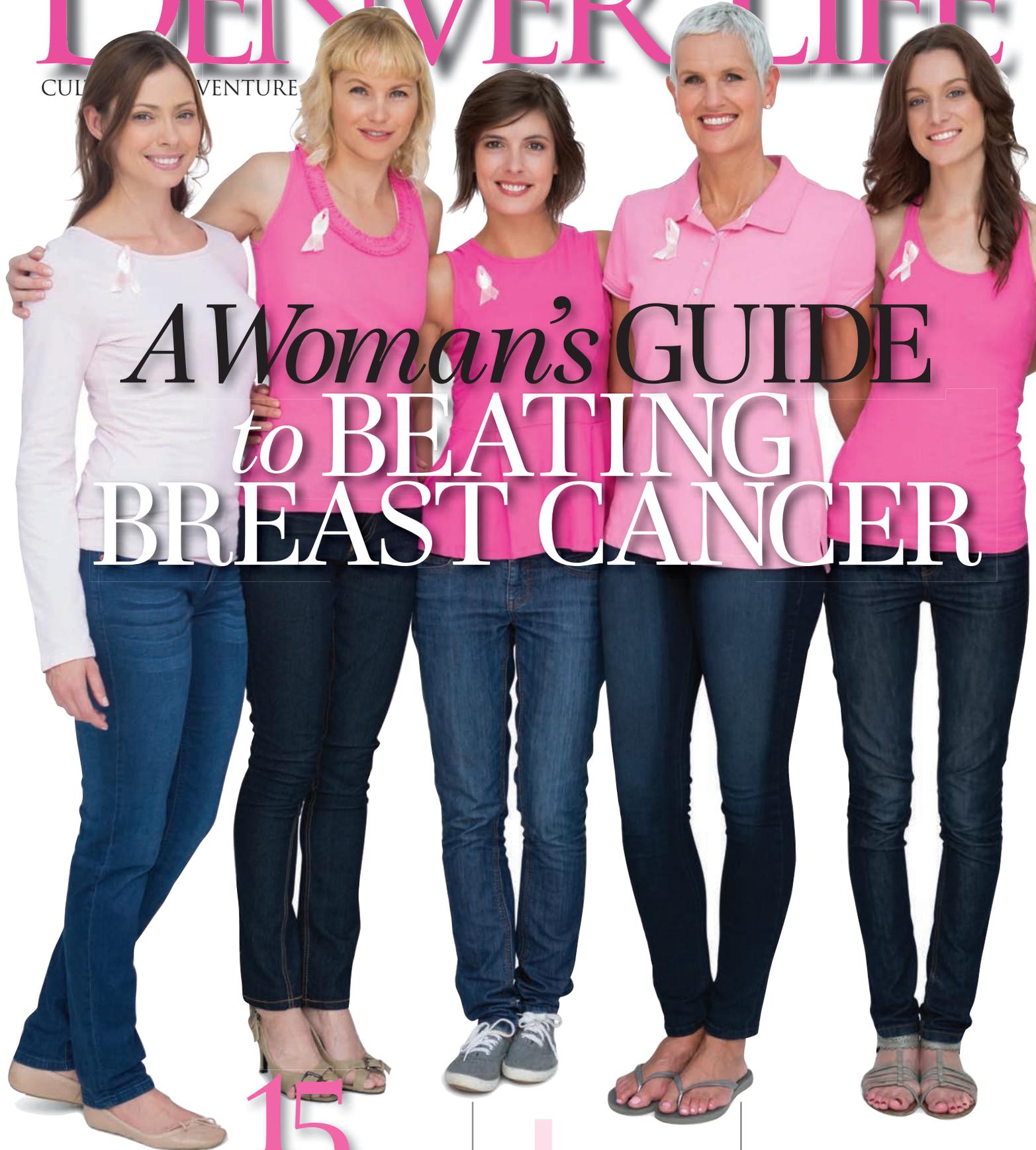


# DENVER LIFE

CULTURE ADVENTURE



## A Woman's GUIDE to BEATING BREAST CANCER

**15**  
PRODUCTS *for*  
the CAUSE

LOCAL SURVIVORS:  
TAMRA WARD &  
CONNIE RICHMOND

EVENTS When, Where  
and What You Can Do  
To Help

# Survivor Profile TAMRA WARD

BY DEBORAH WALDEN OSSI | PHOTO BY JOSEPH ROYBAL

Tamra Ward is an ideal example of two things we know about breast cancer: even perfectly healthy, active women can be diagnosed, and a positive attitude can make all the difference during treatment. Like most women in their mid-40s, Ward was busy at home and work when she received news that a mass had surfaced during her annual mammogram in 2012. Since she was adopted at birth, Ward was unsure if she had a family history of breast cancer, but she had been treated for a benign lump in the past. She assumed this case would be no different. When a biopsy revealed that she had breast cancer, Ward prepared for the fight of her life.

Tapping into her strength as a goal-oriented person, Ward approached her cancer treatment with tenacity. "I worked with my doctors, and I knew exactly when my chemo would end," she says. Having an end-date on her calendar helped Ward stay focused. "I continued to work, and I continued to see my personal trainer. I tried to be as normal as possible." Ward believes that these steps helped her feel in control of her life in spite of surgery and chemo treatments. "I just really wanted to be myself at a time when I wasn't," she says.

Ward's battle with breast cancer made her grateful for her job and insurance, which allowed her to pursue the treatment she needed. Her desire to help women who might not have access to these advantages brought her to Komen Denver. This year, she will chair the Pink Tie Affair. The friendships that Ward established through her journey with breast cancer inspired her to contribute time and energy to the cause. "Helping somebody else made me feel better," she says.

Chemotherapy treatments introduced Ward to two other breast cancer patients, including Connie Richmond (read her story of survival on special edition page 9). Their friendship led Ward to found an online tool called Sisterhood of the Wig, which will launch later this year. The website will connect patients and survivors and foster a message of hope and solidarity. Ward's personal admonition to women with breast cancer is both inspiring and practical. "You can survive this," she says. "You can get through this. It's doable. And get a really good wig."



# A WOMAN'S GUIDE TO *BEATING* BREAST CANCER

BY DEBORAH WALDEN OSSI

Headlines announcing Angelina Jolie's decision to undergo a double mastectomy sparked a national dialogue about the role of one's lifestyle versus genes in the development of breast cancer. Some camps insist that lifestyle is the answer, while others might assume that breast cancer is simply a matter of family history.

In reality, we must combine what we know about lifestyle factors and genetic risks to get a clearer picture of a disease that affects one in eight women. Improving the way we live and understanding our genes—when combined with regular health screenings—will help individuals, families and our country beat breast cancer.

## ALL IN THE FAMILY?

Kelly Johnson, a genetic counselor at Swedish Medical Center in south Denver, explains that DNA research plays a key role in breast cancer prevention and treatment. She points out that many people believe that some women inherit a breast cancer gene. All humans have the same genes, but those who are born with damage on a gene, such as the much-talked-about BRCA1 or BRCA2 gene, have a dramatically increased risk for breast cancer. "One helpful thing that a woman can do is to know her family history and talk to her doctor about it," Johnson says. An open dialogue with a healthcare provider can help each woman follow the right path for breast health.

However, genetics, in spite of popular opinion, is only a very small piece of the puzzle for breast cancer. Johnson says that only five to 10 percent of breast cancer cases can be linked to family history. She asserts that even if a breast cancer patient does not carry a damaged gene, new technology may incorporate a targeted cancer treatment based on the genetic makeup of her particular cancer.

## LIFESTYLE FACTORS

While many people may overestimate the role that heredity plays in breast cancer, it seems that we downplay the significance of lifestyle when we think about this disease. A recent study by GE Healthcare revealed that an alarming 53 percent of Americans could not identify specific risk factors for breast cancer. Chief Medical Officer of Healthcare Systems at GE Healthcare, Dr. Jeff Hersh, says that 30-40 percent of all cancer cases are preventable with lifestyle changes. "It's really helpful to eat a proper, balanced nutritious diet. A high-fat diet increases risk, while a diet high in fruits and vegetables decreases it," he says.

Dr. Hersh also asserts that obesity is a known risk factor for breast cancer, as well as alcohol consumption.

## *date book*

SEPTEMBER 15

**Yoga on the Steps**

*Cheesman Park*

Participants enjoy community yoga while raising funds and awareness for Living Beyond Breast Cancer, an organization providing support and services to women affected by breast cancer. Yoga on the Steps includes a one-hour yoga class for all levels, music and a Healthy Living Expo.

610.645.4567 | [yogaonthesteps.org](http://yogaonthesteps.org)

SEPTEMBER 28-29

**Brides Against Breast Cancer Charity  
Wedding Gown Sale & Bridal Show**

*The Brown Palace*

Brides will find incredible discounts on both new and used wedding gowns while supporting Brides Against Breast Cancer, a nonprofit serving people affected by cancer. Couture and designer dresses will be available in a range of sizes and discounted prices.

877.721.4673

[bridesagainstbreastcancer.org](http://bridesagainstbreastcancer.org)

SEPTEMBER 29

**Komen Denver Race for the Cure**

*Pepsi Center*

Walk or run to help raise funds through Komen Denver for breast cancer treatment and awareness. The foundation contributes to breast cancer research and gives women access to screenings and treatment that they would not be able to afford otherwise.

[komendenver.org](http://komendenver.org)

OCTOBER 10

### Men for the Cure

XJet

This gentlemen-only dinner and live auction supports the fight against breast cancer. Proceeds benefit the Diane O'Connor Thompson Breast Center at the University of Colorado Hospital. John Fox, head coach of the Denver Broncos, is the guest speaker this year. 720.848.7772  
[uch.edu/about/ways-to-give/foundation-events](http://uch.edu/about/ways-to-give/foundation-events)

OCTOBER 12

### Champagne & Diamonds

Grand Hyatt Denver Downtown

This annual fundraiser gala benefits Sense of Security, an organization providing financial assistance to Colorado breast cancer patients in treatment. The fete includes silent and live auctions, as well as a cocktail hour, dinner and dancing.  
303.669.3113 | [senseofsecurity.org](http://senseofsecurity.org)

NOVEMBER 9

### A Pink Tie Affair

Sheraton Hotel Denver

Enjoy an evening of dinner, dancing and casino games, and meet the seven Pink Tie Guys empowering men to get involved in breast cancer awareness. This soiree-with-a-cause brings together supporters to benefit Komen Denver.  
[komendenver.org](http://komendenver.org)

Being fit helps women fight breast cancer, even if they have already been diagnosed. "Being healthy overall benefits your prognosis. It also helps you take treatment better," says Dr. Hersh. He believes that the healthy lifestyle changes are worth the effort, especially since they combat other killers, such as heart disease and diabetes.

## YOUR MOST IMPORTANT TOOL

Michele Ostrander, executive director of Susan G. Komen Denver, is quick to point out that many women who have no family history and no identifiable risk factors still develop breast cancer. In fact, the greatest risk factors for breast cancer are being over 40 and female. For this reason, regular screenings are the most reliable line of defense against breast cancer.

"The best chance we have at beating breast cancer is catching it early," Ostrander says. She recommends that women know what their breasts look and feel like, so that any changes are noticeable. Yearly mammograms and a good relationship with a physician are essential. "The most significant barrier Komen sees is money," she says. For this reason, Komen Denver helps provide screenings and treatment to women who cannot afford them.

## TECHNOLOGY AND TREATMENTS

New trends in breast cancer treatments include targeted therapy based on the genetic makeup of tumors and a new class of chemotherapy drugs called PARP inhibitors, which focus on BRCA gene-related cancers. Advances in radiation therapy and surgical procedures are also beginning to affect the way we approach breast cancer. Many women are now able to conserve breast tissue in lumpectomies rather than opting for mastectomies.

Dr. Lisa Hunsicker, a plastic surgeon at Revalla in Littleton, offers a revolutionary approach to breast cancer with her single-surgery procedure for mastectomy and reconstruction. She believes that it's important for women to know their treatment options, even if they have not been diagnosed, since the emotional impact of a cancer diagnosis makes it hard to choose the best route. "Knowledge is power, and lack of knowledge creates anxiety," says Dr. Hunsicker.

The single-surgery procedure allows her to work with a general surgeon during the time of the mastectomy to reconstruct a patient's breast. It cuts down on the physical and emotional trauma that breast cancer patients often face during months-long reconstruction processes. Dr. Hunsicker's passion for providing breast cancer patients with empowering options led her to create a foundation to educate women about the treatment plans available to them. "You can't demand something you don't know about," she says.



## Breast Cancer RISK FACTORS

We've listed many of the main risk factors involved with breast cancer diagnoses according to the American Cancer Society. For more information, visit [cancer.org](http://cancer.org)

- Gender is one of the greatest risk factors. Although men can be diagnosed with breast cancer, this disease is about 100 times more common among women.
- A woman's family history and genes play a role in breast cancer. Women who have a history of breast cancer in their immediate families are twice as likely to develop it.
- Those with a medical history of benign breast problems face an increased risk of breast cancer.
- Alcohol consumption is a proven risk factor. One drink a day is associated with a small risk for breast cancer. If a woman consumes more than one drink a day, her risk rises dramatically.
- Obesity, especially after menopause, is another lifestyle factor that increases the likelihood of a breast cancer diagnosis.
- Age is a known risk factor. Although some women are diagnosed in their 20s, those who are over 40 are at the highest risk. Women who are 55 or older account for the majority of invasive breast cancer cases.
- Dense breast tissue increases a woman's risk of breast cancer and can also make mammograms less accurate.



## Survivor Profile CONNIE RICHMOND

BY DEBORAH WALDEN OSSI | PHOTO BY JOSEPH ROYBAL

Connie Richmond was feeling great about her health in the early months of 2012. She had begun a diet and exercise program that helped her lose 55 pounds. Taking charge of her health was exciting and empowering for Richmond, and in spite of a family history of breast cancer, her annual mammogram had been clear the previous year. However, during a routine breast self-exam, she found a lump. Tests revealed that Richmond was positive for aggressive breast cancer, which had spread to her lymph nodes.

The fact that cancer entered her life at a time when she was working so hard to stay healthy did not make Richmond bitter. It made her fight harder. “In going through the chemo and the lumpectomy, I continued to work out. I continued to eat right. I felt that I was going to set a good example,” Richmond says.

While speaking with Richmond, it is obvious that her positive attitude was essential during her year-long treatment. Her story is uplifting, but her voice and tone are even more so. “I tried to be upbeat and positive,” she says. Richmond was fortunate to meet two other breast cancer patients, including Tamra Ward (read her story on special edition page 4), during her chemotherapy. The friends began calling themselves “the three chemigos,” and they made sure to stay together for treatments and important doctors’ visits. Their positive attitudes and shared experiences helped Richmond in her fight. “It helps to laugh. What else can you do?” she says.

Although some breast cancers cannot be detected through a self-exam, Richmond credits this practice with saving her life. Her particular cancer had developed in only eight months since her previous mammogram. “Breast cancer can appear very fast,” she says. “I think so many times women think that getting your mammogram is all you have to do.” Richmond’s experience with breast cancer inspired her to get involved with Komen Denver. Last year she walked in the Race for the Cure, and she will participate again this year. Richmond is proud to be involved with an organization that helps women in their battle with cancer and hopes that more people will continue to join in the effort.

# Shaping the future of Breast Reconstruction



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