

BOSTON WOMEN'S BUSINESS

Covering Massachusetts, New Hampshire and Rhode Island

Vol. 10 Issue 2

November 2007 \$4.00

The Professional and Business Woman's Journal

ON THE COVER

Patty Franchi Flaherty

Puts Standing O
Effort Into a Cure,
On...Page 5

INSIDE



Michele Courton Brown, Mary Jo Meisner, Mary Kay Leonard and Julia Mott Toulmin present philanthropy with a purpose, beginning on...Page 6



Women's Business Hall of Fame 2007

Readers Choose
The Top 10
Architects/Designers

Feature Event

The Women of
SIMMONS
Present

BIG
ON BUSINESS

to benefit
Big Sister Association of Greater Boston

Thursday, November 15, 2007
5:30 - 9:00 p.m.
The Fairmont Copley Plaza Hotel

for more information
call 617.236.5304 or visit www.big-sister.org

(Advertisement)

www.womensbiz.com



7 98238 45196 0



Photo: Matthew McKee Photography

Patty Franchi Flaherty Puts Standing O Effort Into a Cure

By Helen Graves

Patty Franchi Flaherty isn't one to suffer silently, although that doesn't mean, eight years into dealing with ovarian cancer, that she's looking for any sympathy.

Instead, the founder and president of Ovarations for the Cure, who's also general manager of Franchi Management Co., is out looking for awareness, early detection, even a cure for the disease typically diagnosed too late for effective treatment since symptoms are so subtle they're described as a "whisper."

"I decided we're going to get up and shout," says Flaherty of founding the nonprofit about a year-and-a-half ago. "That's why I called it 'Ovarations,' because we're going to make some noise here."

In less than two years, the noise has resulted in:

- Symptom-describing, awareness-building pamphlets distributed to OB-GYN offices in eight states and growing;
- More than \$800,000 in research grants with the purpose of discovering a reliable screening technique, improved and less toxic therapies, and a better understanding of the cancer's biology;
- National expansion of the fundraising Stuart Weitzman Fashion Show and Luncheon;
- A symposium for presenting the latest in ovarian cancer advancements;
- Partnerships with other ovarian cancer-related organizations; and
- A platform for connecting patients, doctors and researchers in discovery and best practice discussion.

Each year, 22,000 women are diagnosed with ovarian cancer; less than half will live for five more years.

Only a fifth are in the early stage, before the cancer has spread outside the ovaries and when treatment is 90-percent effective. Seventy percent are diagnosed when the disease has progressed to such a state that treatment is ineffective.

Little is known about ovarian cancer, down to where the cancer begins – critical for detection and therapy – even though it is a sister disease to breast cancer.

Symptoms are vague, with women largely unaware of what they might be: bloating, pelvic or abdominal pain, trouble eating or feeling full quickly, and urinary symptoms such as urgency or frequency.

Flaherty is a tireless spokesperson for this "quiet" disease that she knows all too well. Her mother died of ovarian cancer at the age of 43, leaving behind her husband and six children.

"I don't want to see another woman go through what my mother went through," she says. "I know what she felt like when she was dying and what she was leaving behind."

Flaherty also doesn't want to see other women go through what she went through – her complaints of not feeling herself and of feeling bloated being dismissed by a GP who never considered her family history. Six months later, during her annual GYN exam, Flaherty was diagnosed with stage 3 ovarian cancer.

If only, she says, she had known the symptoms.

After extensive surgery and six months of chemotherapy, Flaherty was in remission. Five years later, the cancer was back.

By then, the Franchi siblings had set up in their mother's memory the Madeline Franchi Ovarian Cancer Research Fund at Dana-Farber Cancer Institute. Flaherty was thinking that there was more that they could do – raise awareness along with funding for research.

At her relapse, she says, "I thought, if I'm going to do this, I'd better do it now."

With some friends, Flaherty held the first Stuart Weitzman fashion show, raising \$120,000 to benefit her mother's fund. But Flaherty still wanted to do more. The 501(c)(3) would mean more responsibility, more financial accountability and



Patty Franchi Flaherty juggles Franchi Management with making ovarian cancer a household name with Ovarations for the Cure.

"That's why I called it 'Ovarations,' because we're going to make some noise here."

Deepening a Commitment

When a friend suggested holding the first Stuart Weitzman Fashion Show and Luncheon to benefit ovarian cancer, Patty Franchi Flaherty said, "If we start this, I know where it's going to go."

The fundraiser was in April, 2006. Just as Flaherty anticipated, a few months later, she had formed Ovarations for the Cure.

Flaherty was ready for the full-time commitment to the nonprofit that supports ovarian cancer research and outreach. For anyone else considering a 501(c)(3), she has the following advice.

• **Know yourself.** "Realize what kind of time commitment you can give. It's like a new child: If you want it to grow, you have to invest your time and energy into it to see it prosper."

• **Follow your passion.** "There are many ways to express your efforts. You can always raise money; it's what you want to do with it. Find something and put your heart and soul into it and go with it."

• **Enjoy the moment.** "The joys and fulfillment I'm getting, even in this short time, hearing from these women, helping them advocate for themselves, connecting doctors to other doctors to talk about their work – this is fun for me. This is my dream."

more results.

Her quest, Flaherty says, is a fighting chance for those with the disease. She'd like ovarian cancer to be the household name that breast cancer has become. She'd like Ovarations for the Cure to do the same for ovarian cancer that Susan G. Komen for the Cure has done for breast cancer.

"We're basically where breast cancer was 25 years ago," she says. "I don't have 25 years to do this, so I've got to get this going faster."

"Faster" is key here.

Ovarations already has seven on staff, including an executive director and a staffer dedicated full time to getting pamphlets in gynecologists' offices with an eye on 50-state distribution.

The fashion show and luncheon is to debut in Orange County, Calif., this month, and to take place in Phoenix, Arizona, Texas and Washington, D.C., next year.

This fall's first-time symposium brought together ovarian cancer thought leaders to present to 100 patients the latest findings in the disease as a way to give them hope.

A jewelry line, centered on hope and the Ovarations butterfly logo; the Happy Feet program, donating Swarovski crystal-studded jelly slippers for a lift to ovarian cancer patients; and the Whisper Network, a message board on the organization's Web site (www.ovationsforthecure.org), are other growing forms of support.

Grant recipients to date include the Desensitization Program, led by Dr. Mariana Castells at Brigham and Women's Hospital, which helps women overcome their allergies or adverse reactions to therapy protocols.

Flaherty relied on the program for the last year-and-a-half of her two-and-a-half years in chemotherapy during this second bout. Weary of chemo and, at the urging of her doctor at Dana-Farber, Ursula Matulonis, she's now part of an out-of-state clinical trial for patients with the BRCA-1 or BRCA-2 gene mutation associated with breast and ovarian cancers.

Taking pills in the morning and at night, Flaherty is not experiencing any side effects and her tumors are shrinking. Once a week, she flies to California for lab work at City of Hope's cancer center.

Meanwhile, and what's as remarkable as everything else she does, Flaherty is also maintaining her role at Franchi Management.

Studying to be a CPA at Bentley College when her mother passed away, Flaherty switched her major to business to join the construction/property management company her father started in 1950.

Upon graduation, she began with managing one apartment complex, then another, building up responsibility until becoming general manager of the Natick corporate office and the property management side of the business.

Today, Flaherty is responsible for 43 employees, 1,100 apartment units and more than 500,000 square feet of office and industrial space. Her brother, Louis, oversees the construction side of the business as well as family-owned Wildcat Mountain and Waltham Athletic Club.

Responsible for hiring and firing, budgets, contracts, management protocol, capital improvement, maintenance, site inspections, and broker and tenant relations, Flaherty's inclusive style of management is serving her well during her battle with cancer.

"They're a great team," she says. "They're in the trenches so they know what needs to be done."

Going forward, Flaherty plans to continue the prosperity of the company her father entrusted to her and her brother.

As for her "baby," Ovarations for the Cure, which she has been underwriting so all money raised goes directly to research and outreach, Flaherty says, "No matter how hard it is, once we're in, people do seem to pick up on our cause. I feel that we're on to something. I can feel the passion of other people. I would love to see this go nationally, to see us make that difference."