

Support to Live Better... and Longer

Diagnosis. That simple word and all the repercussions that tend to come with it can bring a family to their knees. Which is exactly what happened to Shonna Secrest, Project Manager in Security Development and Operations, on Christmas Eve in 2012.

It started out a month earlier with what they thought was a benign tumor in her breast. Her doctor, Dr. Cross, wanted to play it safe and have the mass removed. So Shonna had the procedure and her life went on as normal for the next few weeks.

It was the night before Christmas and Shonna was doing what many of us probably do on Christmas Eve. She was in the kitchen baking cookies with her kids when the phone rang. She was expecting a call from the doctor, but she was not expecting it to be bad news. Upon hearing the breast cancer diagnosis, she dropped the phone and fell to her knees in tears. Being a single mom, she was scared not only for herself, but for the future of her kids.

The focus of this story today is what she has done since her return.

Her first week back to work was terrifying. She was scared, her hair was much thinner and she was 70 pounds lighter. And on top of everything, she was asked to do a culture drill at the VP/Director meeting. "I had no idea what I would talk about," she said. "I woke up at 2 a.m. the morning before, and realized that I was supposed to talk about what God had done for me and my recovery."

In that meeting, Shonna shared with the group a little bit about her journey. She began by saying, "I just want to thank God for my life, because I'm a breast cancer survivor." She went on to talk about how Walmart went above and beyond to make sure her kids were taken care of, her house clean, laundry done and that she and the kids always had a hot meal to eat. "Between my church and my Walmart family, I got through it. But I realized that not everyone has that strong support system in place. And it was at that moment, a light bulb went off. I knew what I had to do. If I was feeling this way, I knew there were others who were experiencing similar struggles."

Right after that meeting, Shonna began getting emails, phone calls and text messages from people who wanted her to talk to their friends, co-workers or wives that were fighting the same fight. "I quickly came to the realization that Walmart has an alarming number of people that have either suffered from breast cancer, or they are close to someone who has." This was the fuel she needed to move her forward and create a cancer support group.

"I got my Senior Vice President, Kerry Kilker's support first. Then I got my facts together, prepared a presentation and started knocking on doors."

During the process of identifying an executive sponsor, she was made aware of a request from Mercy Hospitals. They were asking if Walmart had a support group like the one Shonna was trying to start. Mercy has a boutique called Sister's Boutique. They sell prosthetics, clothing and other items one may need while being treated for cancer, and they accept Walmart insurance. They were looking for a partner to help drive awareness around this benefit. "It was a higher power," said Shonna. "Everything was strategically and perfectly placed the way it should be."

Executive Sponsors confirmed and the Walmart Cancer Program was approved. Shonna quickly enlisted Store, HO, and Club associates to serve as the core team for this program. In June 2014, Shonna and her Core team planned a Walmart Cancer Support Kick-Off event.

The Core team partnered with Sisters Boutique to have a fashion show. It wasn't just any regular old fashion show though. "Our models were all survivors from Walmart Stores, Sam's and the Home Office. Bill Simon was the MC, and his wife, Tammy Simon, also a survivor, was our guest speaker. Marybeth Hays, EVP, Walmart US, also shared her journey as a survivor. In addition, we also had Susan G. Komen in attendance, as well as doctors from Mercy and Highland's Oncology. Store 100 donated pink cupcakes and flower shops donated flowers. There was standing room only, and all our survivors left with a photo keepsake."

Shonna's next step is to reach out to the stores, clubs and International. "I have a big vision," she said. "Cancer isn't limited to the Home Office. It's everywhere and early detection saves lives."

Special thanks to the sponsors, the core team and everyone who has helped Shonna on this journey.

Core Team:

Shonna Secrest, Miki Biggers, Alaya Hardy, Calvin Hardy, Sreekumar Gopinathan, Sharmonica Carter

Executive Sponsor: Walmart

Jerry Geisler, Senior Vice President & Chief Information Security Officer