

‘Little nonprofit that could’ celebrates 10 years of raising funds to help beat breast cancer



Keynote speaker Priscilla Brastianos, MD, shares a laugh during the Terri Brodeur Breast Cancer Foundation's 10th birthday party at Connecticut College's Crozier-Williams Center in New London, Monday, March 28, 2016. Brastianos is the director of the Central Nervous System Metastasis Program at Massachusetts General Hospital-Harvard Medical School. (Tim Martin/The Day)

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By **Ann Baldelli** Day staff writer

New London — Esteemed breast cancer researcher Dr. Priscilla Brastianos credited the Terri Brodeur Breast Cancer Foundation for its support of her cutting-edge study of cancer that spreads beyond the breast to the brain, work that has earned her a "NextGen Star" salute from the American Association for Cancer Research, at the foundation's 10th birthday celebration Monday evening.

"It all started because of support from the Brodeur Breast Cancer Foundation," said Brastianos, who is director of the Central Nervous System Metastasis Program at

Massachusetts General Hospital-Harvard Medical School, and a 2012 TBBCF research grant recipient.

Her work, she said, is inspired by what her mother told her as she was dying of cancer — "that science was not good enough to save my life" — and by "every woman who has died" of cancer, including Brastianos' grandmother — as she outlined her work to more than 100 people at the celebration at the Crozier-Williams Center at Connecticut College. The crowd including past and current Brodeur foundation volunteers, breast cancer survivors, and supporters of the local organization founded a decade ago by a woman dying of breast cancer.

Norma Logan, who died in April 2006, was dismayed after she learned that 40 percent of the funds she helped to raise for breast cancer research for another advocacy group as part of a three-day walk would go to overhead. She proposed the local nonprofit where 100 percent of the monies raised would go toward research and the overhead would be covered by sponsorships or with volunteers.

Two months before her death, in February 2006, she created the Terri Brodeur Breast Cancer Foundation, naming it for a friend who had succumbed to breast cancer the year before. Since its inception, the TBBCF has raised \$3.4 million and funded 34 researchers, many like Brastianos who are doing groundbreaking work in the field of breast cancer.

"Norma was the visionary," said Sandy Maniscalco, who co-founded the group with Logan, and has been instrumental in it ever since. "Norma was the visionary and over the past 10 years I have been become one of her missionaries and I have led more missionaries."

The group's primary fundraiser is its annual Walk Across Southeastern Connecticut every October, but it has been the recipient of other charitable events that have helped to fund its research grants. Earlier this month, on March 4, it announced its distribution of another \$400,000 to four researchers, selected from 45 grant proposals received for 2016.

Patti Burmahl, president of the Brodeur board, said ideally the group's goal is to be out of business, because that would mean there is a cure for breast cancer. But until that time, she said the foundation's focus will be on expanding its reach beyond southeastern Connecticut and Westerly, to include all of Connecticut and more of New England.

It wants to attract additional sponsors and raise sufficient funds to award \$500,000 annually to five separate breast cancer researchers.

Another speaker, Stacey Gualtieri, a decade-long supporter of the foundation and member of its scientific advisory committee which selects the grant recipients, spoke about people who have inspired her to believe that someday there will be a remedy or a cure for breast cancer.

"They truly believe they can beat breast cancer, and the researchers do, too," she said. "They have to believe to make it happen."

Maniscalco said there have been highs and lows over the life of the foundation.

"We are that little nonprofit that could," she said, before the speeches, champagne and the cake was cut. "It's hard to believe we are at 10 years, but I'm so proud, and I know that Norma is smiling down."



Geralyn McPhail, of New London, slices a cake she made with her daughter Lindsay Kelly, during the Terri Brodeur Breast Cancer Foundation's 10th Birthday Party at Connecticut College's Crozier-Williams Center in New London, Monday, March 28, 2016. Geralyn is a breast cancer survivor who was diagnosed one year after her younger sister Norma Logan died from breast cancer. (Tim Martin/The Day)

The cake, made by Norma Logan's sister, Geralyn McPhail, was inscribed with a Margaret Mead quote that Logan favored: "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has."

The champagne toast was offered by John LaMattina, former president of Pfizer Inc. and co-chair of the foundation's scientific advisory committee.

"To the little nonprofit that could," he said, to cheers, applause and raised glasses.

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