



Troy woman shares battle with ovarian cancer on TV

By Terry Oparka
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TROY — Documentary filmmaker Keith Famie was basically finished with his latest 13-part series, “The Embrace of Aging: The Female Perspective of Growing Old,” when he learned of Troy resident Deanna Cosens’ fight against ovarian cancer.

Famie, who lives in Novi, was on the TV show “Survivor,” worked as a chef, and appeared on the Food Network. His latest documentary will air next month on Detroit Public Television

“I learned to produce and direct, and decided I wanted to tell other people’s stories. I didn’t want to be a chef on TV. I really enjoy telling people’s stories,” Famie said. “I only do things that somehow touch people’s lives.”

Last year, Famie and his production company, Visionalist Entertainment Productions, produced “The Embrace of Aging: the Male Perspective of Growing Old.”

“So many people don’t understand what teal means,” he said of the signature ribbon color to raise awareness of ovarian cancer, which Cosens has battled since she was diagnosed with stage three ovarian cancer in September 2011.

“It was just luck I found Deanna and she was open to talk about her struggles. She’s a dynamic lady. This is so important to put in the film. She’s so passionate about helping women understand,” he said. So he filmed the last, unplanned segment to his series at the Village of Rochester Hills with Cosens during the Turn the Village Teal event, held in association with the Michigan Ovarian Cancer Alliance at the Village of Rochester Hills Sept. 20.

The 13 half-hour segments will explore various aspects of female aging. The film features a group of women in Jackson Hole, Wyoming, in their 70s who hike up mountains, as well as a woman who lost 172 pounds and at age 72 has completed triathlons.

“I get really lucky,” Famie said. “I don’t even question how I find people. It just happens.”

Cosens, 55, has spoken out on ovarian cancer as part of the Michigan Ovarian Cancer Alliance, but she’s never been on camera.

She agreed to let Famie film her because “if we can get one woman diagnosed earlier, it’s worth it. Ovarian cancer is a big challenge,” she said. “You have to stay on top of it.”



Documentary filmmaker Keith Famie films an interview with ovarian cancer survivor Deanna Cosens for his TV series “The Embrace of Aging: The Female Perspective of Growing Old,” at the Village of Rochester Hills Sept. 20.



Deanna Cosens, second from left, enjoys the support of her children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren, along with Channel 7 News anchor JoAnne Puritan, during the Turn The Village Teal event to raise money and awareness of ovarian cancer at the Village of Rochester Hills Sept. 20.

She underwent a hysterectomy and six rounds of chemotherapy, as well as a treatment of Taxol. She had needle aspiration of pelvic nodes in March and a round of chemotherapy in April.

She's integrated Eastern and Western medicine into her regimen.

She does meditation and yoga, as well as ki work, which is breath work in the Japanese style, five times a week. She walks two miles a day five times a week, eats a vegan diet and consumes raw juices.

Although she experienced symptoms of ovarian cancer — bloating, pelvic pain, a more frequent need to urinate and a feeling of fullness soon after consuming food — she didn't explore it until she noticed the dress she was having tailored for her son's wedding didn't fit her the same way it had a few weeks prior.

"It's so important that women pay attention to their bodies," Cosens said. "Sometimes we put ourselves last."

"A pap smear does not detect ovarian cancer. Women of all ages get ovarian cancer. Women have a one in 58 risk of getting ovarian cancer in their lifetimes," Cosens said. She said it may be detected with a pelvic rectal exam or trans-vaginal ultrasound test. "Women, in general, are not screened for ovarian cancer."

Cosens said that women who have had children and used birth control pills have a reduced risk, although she did both.

She stays active in ministries at her church, Stonehaven Methodist Church in Troy, and lectures about ovarian cancer at medical schools.

"The message is you deserve better. Women deserve better. Take time to ask questions. Get the information you need. We have to advocate for ourselves. If he or she (your physician) is not interested in what you have to say, move on," she said.

She credits her strong faith in God and supportive family with her recovery.

"What a loving, supportive family I have," Cosens said. "I fill my life with my loving family, dear husband and many friends. While cancer is part of my life, it's certainly not my life."

"It's not our intent to cure disease," Famie said. "It's about personal stories."

"The Embrace of Aging: The Female Perspective of Growing Old" will begin airing at 2:30 p.m. Oct. 12 on Detroit Public Television.