

COMMUNITY TEAM FIGHTS CANCER

THREE MEDICAL CARE PROVIDERS, A PHILANTHROPIST, AND ONE COMMON FOE

BY TODD MATTHEWS



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The Carol Milgard Breast Center is a huge departure from former mammography services in Tacoma and Pierce County, both in its physical appearance and business partnership.

It is a collaboration of TRA Medical Imaging, MultiCare Health System, Franciscan Health System, and the Gary E. Milgard Family Foundation. The four entities have teamed up with one goal in mind—consolidate state-of-the-art mammography services in order to shorten the time it takes for patients to receive their screenings and diagnoses.

“The idea was that when she enters the center, she's here for screening and routine services, and it's one of any number of appointments during the course of her day,” explains Program Director, Marcy Parsons. “She might be here on her lunch break or on her way to get her kids. We tried to make sure the screening was held in a private, comfortable environment, but also made good use of the patient's time. They're here, they get their exam, and then they are off and on their way.”

ONE DOCTOR'S VISION, A COMMUNITY'S SUPPORT

That goal was not achieved overnight.

The center opened in February, but its genesis dates back to 2005. At the time, TRA radiologist Dr. Khai Train had a vision of putting most of the regional mammography services under one roof. He saw an inconvenience most mammography patients and radiologists knew too well: patients moved from one doctor's office to another for their services (to be sure, not every patient is female; according to the American Cancer Society, approximately 2,000 men were diagnosed with the disease in 2008, and 450 died). There was one location for the mammogram, another location for a follow-up visit, and yet another place for a biopsy. “Dr. Tran really thought we could do better by consolidating services into one center,” explains Milgard Breast Center Executive Director Alexis Wilson, a nurse with more than 25 years of experience in the healthcare industry, and a breast cancer survivor. “He went to the two



hospitals and said, 'Why don't we bring everything into one center, realize economies of scale, and realize higher services we could provide?'" He also went to the Gary E. Milgard Family Foundation. Milgard's wife, Carol, was a Tacoma philanthropist and 30-year breast cancer survivor. Gary passed in July 2005; Carol passed in May 2007. Considering Carol's experience with breast cancer, and the Milgard Family Foundation's history of community service, assisting in the creation of the center made sense.

“ It was an opportunity to pool our resources, provide breast health services, and fight breast cancer. ”

In the end, MultiCare and Franciscan committed \$6 million each, and the Milgard Family Foundation pledged a total of \$5 million, \$1 million per year for the first five years. The two hospitals and TRA provided state-of-the-art equipment. Today, MultiCare and Franciscan own the center, and TRA provides staff and business management. According to Marketing Coordinator, Tawnya Lichtenwalter, 150 to 200 patients visit the center each weekday.

Why did two competing hospital heavyweights, Franciscan and MultiCare, agree to enter this business venture? “There really has been a spirit of collaboration between these two entities, which have historically competed in Pierce County,” says Wilson. Although mammography screenings are not huge revenue producers for hospitals, there was initially some concern over who would receive referrals for surgery or biopsy. But they were quickly dismissed. “I think it really speaks to the leadership on the part of both hospital systems that this was in

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the best interest of the community. That is what has guided this project.” MultiCare spokesperson Todd Kelley agrees.

“It was a way for us to work together for a common cause,” he says. “It was an opportunity to pool our resources, provide breast health services, and fight breast cancer.”

A FULL-SERVICE CENTER

Mammography screenings are still offered in Gig Harbor (MultiCare Gig Harbor Medical Park and St. Anthony Hospital) and Lakewood (TRA Medical Imaging), but the Carol Milgard Breast Center has become the hub in Tacoma and Pierce County. Patients who visit the Gig Harbor and Lakewood locations and require further care are referred to the Center, where eight radiologists provide a wide range of services. The first and second floors are where services such as digital

mammography, stereotactic breast biopsy, breast ultrasound, ultrasound-guided breast biopsy, breast MRI, and bone density tests occur. The third floor is home to a community education room that Lichtenwalter envisions will be opened up to doctors region-wide who wish to hold breast disease conferences and seminars. The Center is less than six months old, but there are already plans to grow its mission.

“We want to offer breast imaging services to anyone in the Pierce County area regardless of their ability to pay,” says Wilson. “We don't want any woman not to receive services because she is afraid she can't pay.” To that end, the Center recently created the Carol Milgard Breast Health Society. Today, Wilson and staff are actively raising money and offering founding memberships in order to get the program off the ground. “We look forward to the Carol Milgard Breast Health Society becoming a large philanthropic entity within the breast center.” ←

YMCA BUILDS STRONG BODIES

By Jenna Tharp
YMCA of Tacoma-Pierce County

Pierce County's health needs are significant and with more than 100 community organizations relationships such as MultiCare Health System and Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department, the YMCA continually works toward creating a healthier community.

The YMCA of Tacoma-Pierce County empowers kids and families to make wise and healthy choices through its fitness classes, outdoor retreats, Family Fun Nights and more, and provides kids and families with worry free, fun activities in a

nurturing and supportive environment. The YMCA has been enriching Tacoma-Pierce County communities for 125 years with a commitment to building strong kids, strong families and strong communities.

Determined to build on being a force for good in the community, the YMCA of Tacoma-Pierce County continues to make a positive impacts through its commitment to health and wellness for all. ←

