

The Huntsville Times

Hope's in full bloom for cancer survivors

Wednesday, September 30, 2009

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3 women honored during biannual garden planting

Annalie Maynard's 98-year-old uncle served as a great example of hope when she was going through brain cancer treatment in the spring of 2008.

Every day, he wrote her an e-mail that said, "This is a great day. A great day. The best day ever!"

She decided to believe him, and she's had hundreds of best-day-ers since then.

"He lived to be nearly 100," said Maynard, 62. "I figure he must know something."

Tuesday was one of those best days. That's when she and two other women - Amy Scoggins and Linda Green - were honored with Gardens of Hope at Huntsville Botanical Garden, a tradition where cancer survivors plant flowers and herbs that reflect who they are and their journey through the disease.

Plantings are done in the fall and spring, and it's the seventh planting of the Intergraph-sponsored project.

"This is so humbling," said Linda Green, 53, who was diagnosed with breast cancer in May 2004. "We can all help each other through these difficult times. My journey through cancer has taught me that everyone has to have hope."

Even though she's endured two bouts of cancer, Amy Scoggins, 40, said she's maintained an optimistic outlook. She's had three surgeries, including a double mastectomy.

Along her five-year path with the disease, there have certainly been low points, but she clings to the highlights. She wears one of those around her neck. It's a pink ribbon pendant dotted with Swarovski crystals.

It was purchased for her by some of her son's friends who were on a Randolph School field trip in Washington, D.C.

"That teenage boys would put their money together and buy this for me was almost more than I could handle," Scoggins said. "The funny thing is, I was never a pink person. But now, my whole life is pink."

"I actually feel very, very lucky."

Maynard, a retired librarian and teacher, said her cancer experience has given her an expanded appreciation for all the good things in her life. Each morning, she quietly prays and reflects about those.

"When I get melancholy, anxious or frustrated, I stop and count my blessings," she said. "That puts things in perspective."

The women chose a wide variety of flowers for their gardens. There are rosemary for remembrance, pansies for friendship, bamboo for strength, and pink tulips, pink roses and pink hydrangeas because they're the color that will be forever associated with the fight against breast cancer.

Green personalized her garden even more. She chose mint because her father always crushed a mint leaf in his ice tea; she chose tulip lilies because her mother's name was Lillian.

And she selected Jackson vine in honor of her grandson, 9-month-old Jackson Green, with whom she played a lively game of peek-a-boo when the ceremony was complete.

"No one wants cancer," Green said, "but the outpouring of love and support I've gotten from my community has been so inspirational and surprising. I've had constant hope."