

Maureen's Mission: A promise fulfilled

By Denise Allabaugh
Staff Writer

West Pittston resident William Thiel is on a mission to save lives to fulfill a promise he made to his dying wife.

His wife, Maureen, died of breast cancer at 43 after three doctors told her not to worry about breast lumps, Thiel said.

She was told they were benign fibroid cysts and she did not have breast cancer, he said. By the time she was diagnosed, she was given less than two years to live. Thiel does not want this to happen to others.

Thiel held a press conference Monday at Victoria Inn and Suites in Pittston on the seventh anniversary of his wife's death to launch Maureen's Mission, a non-profit organization founded to promote the early diagnosis and treatment of breast cancer.

Maureen's Mission is focused on adopting a universal standard of care, which would outline steps doctors should take when a woman has a breast lump. Currently, a universal standard of care for the diagnosis and treatment of breast lumps does not exist.

"If a universal standard of care had existed when my wife, Maureen, found her first lump in 1994, she might be alive today," Thiel said. "If doctors had followed the accepted standard of care for the diagnosis, treatment and follow-up of a breast lump, I might still have the love of my life and my two sons, Erik and Ryan, might still have a mom."

The Thiels formerly lived in Bushkill, Pike County. In the summer of 2004, more than six years after Maureen's death, her malpractice case went to trial in Monroe County Court.

After hearing extensive testimony, a jury awarded \$5.4 million in damages, the largest malpractice verdict in the county's history, on June 11, 2004.

According to the Pocono Record, a jury found Dr. Pamela Villanyi of Shawnee Medical Group 60 percent responsible and Dr. Lawrence Klein of Pocono Surgical Associates 40 percent responsible for Maureen's death. Dr. Frank Fusco of Shawnee Medical Group was found not negligent.

Mrs. Thiel filed the lawsuit in 1997 after her doctors told her she had cancer. Mr. Thiel said she did not sue her doctors for the money, but because she wanted to hold them accountable for failing her. She hoped the case would save oth-

er women's lives, he said.

Thiel has been lobbying state and federal officials for a universal standard of care. His organization is partnering with other breast cancer organizations to publish a pamphlet on standards of care to place in doctors' offices around the country.

QUICKINFO

Maureen's Mission will hold a "Swing for Life" golf outing Saturday, May 28, beginning at 8 a.m. at the Four Seasons golf course in Exeter.

Thiel wants to make "Swing for Life," a national fund-raising event for Maureen's Mission similar to the Race for the Cure.

so much about doctors' malpractice insurance rates, a universal standard of care would also reduce the number of malpractice lawsuits caused by

"Every day in America, women just like Maureen are being sent home and told not to worry," Thiel said. "With a universal standard of care in place, that won't happen anymore, and more women won't have to die. At a time when we hear

the misdiagnosis or delayed diagnosis of breast cancer."

Thiel created a Web site, www.maureensmission.org. In the future, he hopes to raise enough money to establish a fund to pay for biopsies for women who can't afford them.

Thiel said his wife's strength and courage in the face of death "should be an inspiration to us all." She died after suffering through multiple surgeries, chemotherapy and stem cell replacement therapy, he said.

"She made me promise to tell her story so that other women wouldn't have to die like she did," Thiel said. "It is a promise that will change the world, a promise that will save lives, a promise I will fulfill at all costs."

Thiel said he wants to send a message to women who have a lump and don't know to do to call him at 388-1058 or visit www.maureensmission.org.

"My goal, the thing I want to accomplish most, the thing that would fulfill my promise to Maureen, is to save just one woman's life," Thiel said.



JACK KELLEY/CITIZENS' VOICE

Bill Thiel, founder of Maureen's Mission in honor of his late wife, shown above, is focused on establishing a universal standard of care for breast cancer patients.

After leaving the press conference, Thiel went to his wife's grave at 4:23 p.m., the

time she died seven years ago.

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