

WP man out to fulfill promise to late wife

Maureen Thiel's cancer went undiagnosed until it was too late

BY RYAN O'MALLEY
Dispatch Correspondent

If doctors implemented a Universal Standard of Care across the nation, Maureen Thiel, a breast cancer fighter and victim, might still be alive. The lack of the standard of care is why her husband, West Pittston resident Bill Thiel, is carrying on a promise he made to his late wife — to tell her story so that other women won't have to die the way she did.

During a press conference Monday afternoon, Thiel, who is the Executive Director of Maureen's Mission, a non-profit organization founded to promote the early diagnosis and treatment of breast cancer, discussed his wife's misdiagnosis, battle, and his proposed implementation of a Universal Standard of Care.

When Maureen Thiel found a small lump on her breast in 1994, three different doctors told her that the lump was nothing to be concerned about,

and that she should just come back for her yearly mammogram, Thiel explained.

During her visit to the third doctor, a surgeon, Maureen complained about sharp pain running down her arm, that she believed was caused by the lumps. It was then that the surgeon told her she would need to have one of her breasts removed, but it wasn't cancerous.

After finding another lump, this time in her armpit, the Thiels went to the Newton Memorial Hospital in New Jersey, on doctor's orders, for an immediate biopsy, which revealed cancer.

The Thiels sued the three doctors for misdiagnosis and, in 2004, six years after Maureen's death, were awarded \$5.4 million by a jury in Monroe County.

The fight against doctors misdiagnosing patients didn't

stop there for Thiel. Through Maureen's Mission, he hopes to bring greater attention to the misdiagnosing that happens often in the country.

'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.'

According to a press release, Thiel's proposed Standard of Care will be the same throughout the country. Also, all lumps would be treated as cancerous until proven benign. If a lump is found, the patient would receive a pamphlet detailing the steps that will be taken to provide an early diagnosis.

Thiel's plan also calls for a

mammogram or ultrasound to be performed immediately, which will be followed by discussion of a biopsy, where the patient will be given a choice to proceed with the biopsy.

If these steps were followed, Thiel feels Maureen would have got through her ordeal and would still be here as his wife, and mother to their two children Erik and Ryan.

During the press conference,

Thiel asked women who might have a lump to not be satisfied by doctors assuring them that the lump is not cancerous without giving the proper diagnosis.

"If you have a lump and don't know what to do, call me," he said. "If you have been told to go home, don't worry about it, call me. If you have

been told to come back in a year for your annual mammogram, call me. 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."

For more information on Maureen's Mission, visit www.maureensmission.org (the site is still under construction) or call Bill Thiel at (570) 388-1058 or email him at wthiel1106@aol.com.

A "Swing For Life" golf outing will be held at Four Season's Golf Club in Exeter on May 28 from 8 a.m. until dusk.