

HERALD-NEWS



ShawLocal.com

LOCAL NEWS



21-day sentence

Lockport woman gets jail time for role in Jan. 6, 2021, riot in D.C. / **5**

STATE

Rocky reform

Chicago mayor names new school board after all members resign / **12**

NATION



Boarding up

Florida evacuating for Milton while still clearing Helene's debris / **13**

SHAW LOCAL
News Network



'BETTER EVERY DAY'

Annual mammogram helps Silver Cross employee catch breast cancer / **4**

Up To **\$200 OFF**
WATER HEATER INSTALL

\$50 OFF
COOLING OR PLUMBING REPAIR

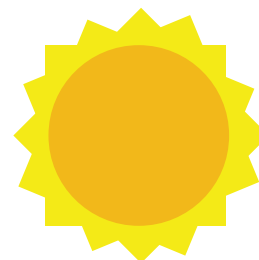


PDM SINCE 1885
PLUMBING, HEATING & COOLING

Good Old-Fashioned Service

815-390-7595
CallPDM.com Lic. 055001549

TODAY'S WEATHER



HIGH
75
LOW
44

Complete forecast on page 8

Mammogram helped Silver Cross employee catch breast cancer

Shannon Connolly said she's feeling 'better and better every day'

By DENISE M. BARAN-UNLAND
dunland@shawmedia.com

An employee at Silver Cross Hospital in New Lenox is on her way to beating breast cancer, thanks to faithfully getting her annual mammogram.

Shannon Connolly, 47, of Frankfort and manager of central scheduling and insurance verification at Silver Cross, wasn't worried when she underwent her mammogram in November, even after learning she'd likely need follow-up tests because the technician saw "something."

"I'd had a vaccine like two weeks before – the pneumonia vaccine," Connolly said. "In my friend, a lymph node swelled up after the vaccine. I'm thinking, 'Oh, OK. It's just a swollen lymph node.'"

Connolly said she had a diagnostic mammogram and ultrasound Jan. 2, which led to a biopsy after she was told that "pretty certain there was a tumor in my right breast."

Even then, Connolly said she still wasn't concerned. She had the biopsy a week later, she said, and 30 hours later learned that she had invasive ductal carcinoma.

So Connolly scanned her pathology report, looking for signs that her tumor was hormone-positive, meaning it had receptors for estrogen or progesterone. Connolly also looked for her HER2 status.

HER2 is a protein that can speed the growth of cancer cells, according to the American Cancer Society. Targeted treatments are available for breast cancer that is hormone-positive or HER2-positive, and Connolly was hoping her cancer could benefit from those targeted treatments.

Connolly said she's the oldest of four children. Almost three years ago, her brother died of a massive heart attack at age 43. So for the sake of her family – as well as herself – Connolly wanted the best outcome for her cancer.

"The biggest thing I wanted to know: Was I triple negative? Or was this hormonally fed?" Connolly said.

But Connolly said couldn't find that information on the report and asked her breast cancer navigator when she called the next day. An hour after that Connolly had the answer.

"I was triple negative," Connolly said. "Now I was scared."

Connolly said she gave herself a



Photos provided by Shannon Connolly

Shannon Connolly poses for a photo on her last day of chemotherapy at Silver Cross Hospital in New Lenox.

week to process the news before sharing it her family. After that, the process went "really, really fast."

"That's when you start seeing all kinds of doctors," Connolly said. "And I really did want to be at the University of Chicago at Silver Cross."

Connolly said she her breast surgeon was Dr. Jennifer Gambla, her oncologist was Dr. Simona Chivu and her plastic surgeon was Dr. Mark Tan, who performed the breast reconstruction at the time of Connolly's mastectomy.

The three lymph nodes under her right armpit that fed the cancer were removed during surgery, Connolly said.

Afterward, Connolly learned her tumor was encapsulated, which meant no cancer was detected in her breast tissue or lymph nodes.

"That's all wonderful news to hear when you wake up," she said.

Connolly said the pathology report came back stage 1, grade 3.

She started chemotherapy April 15, which included four rounds of one type of chemotherapy and then 12 weekly rounds of another, she said.

She did not return to work until July 8 so she could focus on her cancer care and because, "I have a pretty fast-paced job," Connolly said. She completed chemotherapy on Sept. 3.

She said fasting worked better for her than a light meal before treatments, as did drinking plenty of water and taking anti-nausea medication. As a result, Connolly's side effects were minimal and tolerable, and she was never dehydrated, Connolly said.

She did stretching exercise "to get her mobility back" in her right arm and had no trouble with lymphedema. She's getting her energy back and the brain fog and "aches and pains" are dissipating.

"I'm feeling more like myself and better and better every day," Connolly said.

"I'm feeling more like myself and better and better every day."

Shannon Connolly, manager of central scheduling and insurance verification at Silver Cross Hospital, on her breast cancer diagnosis

Chivu, a board-certified medical oncologist and hematologist at the University of Chicago Medicine Comprehensive Cancer Center at Silver Cross, called Connolly a "poster child" for breast cancer care because she followed the screening guidelines, and had a good prognosis and few side effects from treatment.

"She's very resilient," Chivu said. "She's very opened-minded, and she took everything with a light heart."

Connolly had a very likable and positive mental attitude and approached her treatments "with as much trust in her caregivers as possible," Chivu said.

"The communication between us is very important," Chivu said.

With treatments now complete, Connolly said she has reached the surveillance stage of her care. That means Connolly will see her providers every three to six months and then every six months for five years, she said.

Visits will include exams and occasional tests and bloodwork, Chivu said. Of course, Connolly should promptly report any new symptoms, Chivu added. The cure rate for triple negative breast cancer when caught early can approach 80% to 85%.

"So she should be in good shape," Chivu said.

Connolly stressed the importance of "staying diligent" with regular screening mammograms and breast self-examinations, along with cultivating a positive attitude and accepting help and support from loved ones.

"Everybody kept saying to me, 'Oh, you're so strong' or 'You've done this with such grace,'" Connolly said. "I was constantly surrounded by support and love and encouragement."

Connolly also was a Silver Cross Rock Star award winner in November 2023 and was featured in Silver Cross' employee newsletters as an advancing employee, according to Debra Robbins, director of marketing and communications at Silver Cross.

"She's an inspiration to all of us in so many ways, and her positivity has shone through, throughout her cancer journey," Robbins said.