

Advancing Awareness

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One Valley woman hopes to prevent ovarian cancer by telling her story and shedding light on the “silent killer.”



On her 40th birthday, Anne Rita Monahan was given news that would change her life, and it was anything but a gift. After struggling for 10 years with several suspicious health issues and being misdiagnosed by multiple doctors, Monahan was ultimately told she had ovarian cancer on Oct. 10, 2001. Seven years later, she is still battling the stage-four disease.

The news could not have arrived at a worse time. Monahan was content with the life she had built in the Valley. A graduate of Arizona State University, Monahan had established a 15-year career in marketing and advertising and achieved her lifelong dream of building a gymnastics studio.

Of course, the news of ovarian cancer was unexpected.

"It's surreal. It's like, 'You must be talking to someone else. You can't be talking to me,'" Monahan says. "Then you decide, 'However long I have left, I better make the most of it.'"

And Monahan is doing just that. Despite her stage-four status, she continues to find the strength needed to fight the disease, motivated not just for herself but for women all around the world. Following her diagnosis, Monahan sold her gymnastics studio. She left her job as a business counselor upon falling back from remission. Monahan decided the best way to occupy her free time was to start a nonprofit. In September 2007, in time for Ovarian Cancer Month, Monahan and her friend Richard Corley established the Anne Rita Monahan Foundation (ARM).

Although October is typically thought of as breast cancer awareness month, Monahan also wishes to draw attention to the presence and severity of ovarian cancer in the female population. Because symptoms of ovarian cancer are often misdiagnosed as Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS) or other gastrointestinal diseases, Monahan feels it's important for women to be aware of the possible signs of the disease.

"We were thinking that when you think of ovarian cancer, there isn't really a face to it," Monahan says. "When people think of ovarian cancer, I want them to think 'Anne Rita Monahan.'" Currently, ARM is collecting donations for an ovarian cancer study to be conducted by Dr. Heather Cunliffe at Translational Genomics (TGen) in Phoenix. The foundation has \$15,000 raised and is working toward raising the \$100,000 necessary for the study through a series of fund-raisers and public donations.

In remembrance of her diagnoses and others who have struggled with the disease, Monahan will hold an ice cream social in November among friends and contributors to the ovarian cancer cause in November.