

EAST END LIVING

Ellen Hermanson Foundation Co-founder Julie Ratner Talks Summer 2023

BY VINCENT ANTHONY

After losing her sister to breast cancer in 1995, Dr. Julie Ratner realized that few services were available in the Hamptons to support women in need while battling the disease.

She recalls Ann Ciardullo saying to her, “You need to honor Ellen, she was a remarkable woman.” And so, she did. Co-founded in 1997 by Ratner and her late sister Emily Levin, the Ellen Hermanson Foundation was born as a 5K run. This year marked their 28th annual Ellen’s Run. But the foundation does so much more than host a run.

“People asked me, ‘Why are you doing a run in the Hamptons? It’s wealthy,’” Ratner recalls, noting that there were many services needed, especially for women who are “medically underserved.” She notes that single mothers, women in abusive relationships or those experiencing economic hardship historically struggle to access quality health care.

“Working closely with Southampton Hospital, we realized the need for services and technology was great,” she says. In 2008, Bob Chaloner of Southampton Hospital approached Ratner to propose a partnership to fund a breast cancer center, named in Ellen’s honor. Nine months later, it opened.

While research continues to get closer, the foundation does not fund research efforts; they focus on care. “The magic bullet hasn’t been found yet,” Ratner notes. “But access to care is always needed.”

Ratner says that when they opened the Ellen Hermanson Breast Center, they only had two requirements: “First, no woman could be turned away because of insurance. The second, figuring out how to marry the rigor of a teaching hospital with the warmth of a community organization.”

She recalls that after witnessing Ellen’s experiences in treatment — which she describes as rather cold — she wanted to ensure that women coming to the Ellen Hermanson Breast Center were met with care, warmth and expertise.

“It’s been named a (Breast Imaging) Center of Excellence by the American College of Radiology,” Ratner notes.

Beyond medical services, the foundation also focuses on educational outreach and psychosocial support for breast cancer survivors and their families through “Ellen’s Well.” These mental health-centered services are a necessary complement to medical treatment. The foundation also employs a bilingual social worker to help Spanish-speaking patients and families as well.

“The mind and body are inextricably linked. You can’t treat one without the other,” Ratner explains. “It’s trauma. It’s disregulating for someone, and



JULIE RATNER

for the whole family. The anxiety of having a life-threatening disease can be overwhelming. For people who are caregivers that can be an overwhelming experience.”

Founded as a family and for her family, it is clear Ratner is dedicated to ensuring the foundation remains very family-oriented. It all comes back to her sister, Ellen.

“(Ellen’s) daughter never knew her mom healthy and vibrant,” she says. “I’m going to make sure she knows she had a spectacular mother. I carry on the work she did as an advocate and journalist.”

Keeping their crucial cause going is no small task, and Ratner expresses her gratitude to the community for being “so involved” over the years.

“We depend on our events to keep the programs running,” she says of the upcoming run. “It is just a great, great community event. We expect about 850 runners. It’s like a party, a wonderful community event. We have the serious runners, fun runners, and then the walkers and the breast cancer survivors.”

Of their recent Summer Gala on August 26, she calls it “a lovely time, having fun knowing that you are doing something good that affects our community.”

“It’s a great privilege to be part of this community,” she adds.

“So many charities come to the Hamptons to raise money,” Ratner says, because of its many generous residents — whom she encourages to donate to the Ellen Hermanson Foundation, and her reasoning is simple: “Our money stays right here, where it can actually help our community directly.”

At the gala, there were live auction items including tickets for Stephen Colbert, Billy Joel and the opening night at the Metropolitan Opera. Donors also participated in a paddle race to fund specific services and programs, such as a tomosynthesis machine (an advanced mammogram technology) and an emergency fund for patients.

For more information, visit ellenhermanson.org.