

BC3's new Project Pink week panel plans fundraisers after top donations in 2018

Healed professor among volunteers to raise money at BC3 locations for breast cancer research

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Melissa Philson, a Butler County Community College assistant professor from Greenville, Mercer County, is shown on BC3's main campus in Butler Township on Thursday, Sept. 19, 2019. Philson, a breast cancer survivor, is among volunteers on BC3's first Project Pink week committee, which plans fundraisers on BC3's main campus and at its additional locations in October to benefit breast cancer research.

(Butler, PA) Memories of her 11-year-old son Noah confiding nightmares about his mother dying following her cancer diagnosis prompts tears with Melissa Philson, a 47-year-old Butler County Community College assistant professor.

“It is still probably the toughest part to think of,” she said.

While she can also still hear the “shrill scream from my son” when repeating the oncologist’s finding, she also sees the blank stare on the face of her 13-year-old daughter Makenna, who Philson said would come to believe she had to “be the rock” and an early mother figure to “keep it together for her little brother.”

Philson would quickly tour PNC Park with Noah, and visit Cedar Point with Makenna – “all these things you put off,” she said, “and say you are going to do.”

Two years later, her disease – malignant invasive ductal carcinoma, estrogen and progesterone receptor positive, HER 2 negative – remains in remission after a May 2017 bilateral mastectomy and four rounds of chemotherapy over 12 weeks.

Philson is among BC3 volunteers serving on the college’s first Project Pink week committee, whose Oct. 7-11 fundraising activities for breast cancer research culminate with a 2019 Dig Pink volleyball game on BC3’s main campus in Butler Township, where the Pioneers will swap their blue and white uniforms for pink in an Oct. 11 Western Pennsylvania Collegiate Conference matchup.

Gift-basket raffles, donation buckets, 50-50 drawings, and sales of 2019 Dig Pink long- or short-sleeved shirts and pink ribbons on BC3’s main campus will join similar activities at BC3 @ Armstrong in Ford City, BC3 @ Brockway in Brockway, BC3 @ Cranberry in Cranberry Township, BC3 @ Lawrence Crossing in New Castle, and BC3 @ LindenPointe in Hermitage.

250K in U.S. diagnosed annually

Philson in March 2017 became the first member of her family and one of the quarter-million women and men in the United States who, according to the National Breast Cancer Foundation, are diagnosed with the disease each year.

Because of her early detection and treatment, she was not one of what the National Breast Cancer Foundation reports as the more than 40,000 Americans whom the disease claims annually.

BC3’s breast cancer awareness month activities had been organized by BC3’s volleyball program and the Student Life office since 2010, the first year in which the college assisted the Side-Out Foundation, a Virginia charity that raises awareness and funds for the treatment of metastatic breast cancer through mainly volleyball-related events.

BC3 in 2018 raised \$3,234, its highest total for the Side-Out Foundation. BC3 has contributed \$15,989 to the nonprofit organization in the past nine years.

Philson, a psychology educator from Greenville, Mercer County, learned from her oncologist in October 2017 that nothing in her bloodwork “was elevated” and celebrated with trips to sporting events with her husband, J.R., and daughter and son.



“I am going to have to give back”

Project Pink week at BC3 represents her opportunity to give back, said

Philson, whose children today are 15 and 13. She and her husband will mark their 19th wedding anniversary Oct. 14.

Butler County Community College volleyball players Kaylee Ebbert, left, a Mars High School graduate, and Makenzie McDowell, of Knoch, are shown in BC3’s Field House on the college’s main campus in Butler Township on Monday, Sept. 16, 2019. The Pioneers will wear pink uniforms during a 2019 Dig Pink game and breast cancer research fundraiser on Oct. 11 against Pennsylvania Highlands Community College.

“I love what I do, and I love BC3,” said Philson, a college employee since 2003.

Upon learning of her diagnosis, Philson’s students taped inspirational signs on her office door, which she would see after chemotherapy treatments while continuing to teach through the fall 2017 semester.

“I always thought, ‘I am going to have to give back,’” Philson said. “The outpouring of support when I was going through this ... it could still bring tears to my eyes.”

BC3 volunteers from Oct. 7-11 will sell in the Project Pink tent on BC3’s main campus long-sleeved 2019 Dig Pink shirts for \$18, short-sleeved shirts for \$12, and one gift-basket raffle ticket for \$1, 10 for \$5 and 25 for \$10.

Students in BC3’s social awareness club will place donation buckets in the BC3 Bookstore in the Student Success Center, the Pioneer Café in Founders Hall and in Logan Café in the Heaton Family Learning Commons, and possibly at other main campus sites.

BC3 @ Lawrence Crossing and BC3 @ LindenPointe plan gift-basket and 50-50 raffles, ribbon and 2019 Dig Pink shirt pre-sales, and Project Pink week donation buckets. BC3 @ Lawrence Crossing will also sell pizza, potato chips and bottled water for \$2 with proceeds also benefiting the Side-Out Foundation.

BC3 @ Armstrong plans ribbon sales and gift-basket raffles, as does BC3 @ Cranberry, which will also have 2019 Dig Pink shirt pre-sales.

BC3 @ Brockway plans ribbon sales and placing a donation bucket.

BC3 employees will also be able to authorize Oct. 31 payroll deductions to benefit the Side-Out Foundation.

A celebration of “Wow!”

Winners of main campus gift-basket raffles will be announced during the second and third matches of BC3’s 2019 Dig Pink volleyball game against Pennsylvania Highlands Community College. The game begins at 6 p.m. in BC3’s Field House, which will be decorated with pink balloons.

Admission to BC3’s home volleyball games is usually free. Those attending the Oct. 11 game will be charged \$3 if wearing a 2019 Dig Pink shirt, and \$5 if not.

Those attending can also sample cookies topped with light pink icing and magenta icing ribbons.

Guests to BC3’s Succop Theater for the Oct. 11-13 performances of “Mamma Mia!” by the Musical Theatre Guild of Butler can also place donations in a BC3 Project Pink week bucket in the theater lobby.

Breast cancer awareness month represents “a nice reminder of where I was two years ago,” Philson said.

“Even though these past six months have been hellacious,” she said she thought in October 2017, “I am going to get to that point where it is like, ‘Look! One year went by already. Look! Two years went by already.’”

“It is a celebration of ‘Wow! Look! I have blinked and two years have gone by.’”

“And we are here.”

Those unable to participate in activities on BC3’s main campus or its additional locations can donate to BC3’s Project Pink week, or pay for a 2019 Dig Pink shirt, at <https://giving.side-out.org/campaigns/15909>.

Those visiting the site can click on the pink “Donate” button, identify the amount of the donation, and if seeking to purchase a 2019 Dig Pink shirt, check the “Give in honor or memory of a loved one” and type Dig Pink shirt in the message box.

Donors are also asked to check the box covering the processing fee so that 100 percent of the donation benefits the Side-Out Foundation.