

## HEALTHY LIVING

## Business of survival

Five months into her treatment for breast cancer, a wife and mother launches firm — and lifts her spirits

BY HELENA OLIVIERO

Cox News Service

Tricia Dempsey of Cumming, Ga., was five months into her chemotherapy treatment for breast cancer, suffering from nausea, thrush and a rash similar to hives when she took a highly unusual step to help with her recovery.

She started a new business.

This was back in April 2003. And not only did Dempsey reach the five-year-survivor mark, but her business has survived, too.

Starting a new business while undergoing aggressive treatment for cancer is not for everyone.

But for Dempsey, the new business forced her to focus on something concrete and positive at a time when she could have easily slipped into a deep despair.

Dempsey, now 38, was diagnosed with an advanced stage of breast cancer (stage III) in October 2002, after two false negative mammograms told her she had nothing to worry about. But her gut instinct told her that little bump near her underarm was cancer, so she went to a diagnostic center specializing in breast diagnosis. A biopsy confirmed it.

"The mother side of me wanted to be sure my husband could put Catherine's hair in ponytails and know how to give her butterfly kisses and the wife part of me felt sad I wouldn't get to grow old with my true partner in life, my husband, Jeff. Once I pulled myself together, I learned several important lessons about life with and after breast cancer," said Dempsey.

As Breast Cancer Awareness Month runs through October, Dempsey shares her thoughts about her decision to start a new business, the lessons she has learned, and hitting the five-year milestone.

On starting her new IT staffing business, Agile, a few months after her cancer diagnosis:

"The natural reaction is to be very

sad and cry a lot. And I would have my moments. We used to have this enclosed shower and it was the only place I would take my shower and no one could see me cry. And then I would get out of the shower and focus on something positive. If I had not had my business to focus on, I would have sunk into a very deep depression. It was truly energizing. At 90 days, I got business cards and set up a Web site and hired employees. At six months, I got office space. We now have 27 employees."

On the five lessons she has learned:

**Lesson One: Focus on surviving, not dying**

"Death rates are on the decline, new and improved drugs are extending lives and with strong support and faith, I was going to make it!"

**Lesson Two: Take the time to build a support team**

"I lined up a chemo team — family member or friend who could accompany me to every chemo treatment as well as support and help with meals and taking care of my family. I had to realize that people wanted to do something, so I should let them."

**Lesson Three: Be aggressive**

"One thing I didn't want to regret was that I didn't 'go for it' to eradicate my breast cancer. I always opted for the most aggressive treatment."

**Lesson Four: Her breasts were never perfect to begin with**

"The night before my double mastectomy I looked at my breasts for a long period. The left was larger than the right, one sagged more than the other. ... After my reconstruction, my breasts actually look better."

**Lesson Five: There is life after breast cancer**

"I now have an 8-year-old daughter and a husband of 13 years who make me thankful every day that I have survived the disease. I started a business where I spend time with a team of people I truly enjoy and respect. I suck the life out of



JESSICA MCGOWAN / COX NEWS SERVICE

Tricia Dempsey talks with her daughter, Catherine, 8, in her office in Cumming, Ga. Dempsey, a five-year breast cancer survivor, started her own company in the midst of treatment. "If I had not had my business to focus on, I would have sunk into a very deep depression," she said.

each and every day and focus on what I can control."

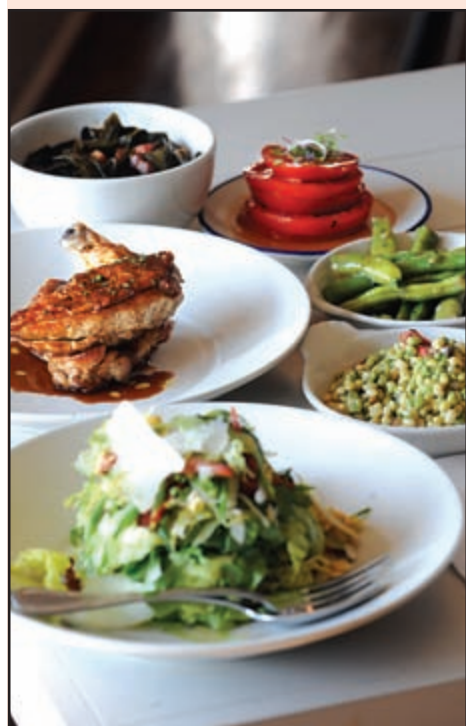
About hitting the five-year mark without a recurrence:

"It's significant for me because I have finished all my treatment. But I don't think five years is the end-all, be-all and

that I will never have breast cancer again. I will make choices to contribute to my health for years to come, like lowering stress and eating healthy and trying to keep my mind focused on positive things, and I am always conscious about what I can do that's in my control." ■

## HEALTHY EATING

## The secrets for fit people: Willpower and motivation



HYOSUB SHINE / COX NEWS SERVICE

Roast chicken and vegetables are a healthy alternative at Atlanta's JCT Kitchen & Bar.

They're slim, they're trim and they love to dine. How do they do it? Well, it turns out that fit folks really are different from their bulge-challenged friends. Sure, there are genetic physiological differences in all of us that predetermine our metabolic rates and the way our bodies store fat.

But it's the power of mind (read: willpower and motivation) that keeps those skinny people skinny. Dr. John Foreyt, professor of psychiatry and behavioral sciences at Baylor College of Medicine in Houston, says studies have identified what makes them different. "They are eternally vigilant with daily or weekly weighing, they monitor calorie intake and they're highly active exercising at least 60 minutes a day," he says.

And according to Dr. Jim Hill's research from the National Weight Control Registry (a database of more than 5,000 people who have lost more than 30 pounds and kept the weight off for at least a year), their exercise of choice is not marathon running. It's walking, but walking enough to burn 400 calories a day.

What else does the slim set do to maintain weight? Here's a menu of healthy behaviors.

► **They eat until satisfied, not stuffed.** Try putting your fork down halfway through a meal and asking yourself using a 1 to 10 scale, "How full am I?" Take a sip of water and think about it some more. Talk to your dining companions. You'll give yourself time to gauge how hungry you really are.

► **They eat more fruits and vegetables.** Bet you're not surprised by this one! According to a 2006 study in the Journal of the American Dietetic Association, healthy-weight women eat one more serving of fruit and eat more fiber and less fat per day than overweight people. And even though many people associate weight loss with high protein intake, the statistics from the successful dieters in the National Weight Control Registry don't support the eat-all-the-steak-you-want diet. Their diets were on average 20 percent protein, 24 percent fat and 56 percent carbohydrates.

► **They have a plan and stick to it.** Seventy-eight percent of successful dieters in the National Weight Control Registry ate breakfast every day. And — sorry to tell you this — they consistently

monitor their food intake.

So how does all of this work in the real world? Here's an example of putting these slim strategies to work at a place you might not think would fit into lifelong fitness. But it does!

JCT Kitchen & Bar, an Atlanta restaurant famous for "Southern Farmstead Cooking" serves up some of the city's best fried chicken and baked macaroni and cheese.

But look more closely at Executive Chef Ford Fry's menu of seasonal fresh and local ingredients and you'll find plenty of healthy choices.

His Sunday Suppers menu offers nine vegetables and the meal starts with a salad of mixed lettuces and vegetables. I'd get the Roast Chicken with natural jus, collard greens or pole beans and sliced tomatoes drizzled with a little extra virgin olive oil. ■

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