

# Breast cancer hits home

—Ashley Rogers—

Staff Writer

Breast cancer will affect one in eight women in the United States, but will impact many more; both men and women. Breast cancer not only affects individuals, but their families as well. The lives of two women with connections to the University of Montevallo, along with the lives of their families, were changed forever by the disease.

Dr. Susan Thompson, Mass

Communication professor at the University of Montevallo, knew something was amiss after finding a tumor in 1998. "I suspected it was cancer immediately, so I went to the doctor and had a mammogram. It came back negative, but you could feel the lump, so they did an ultrasound and it showed up. A biopsy confirmed that it was cancer." However, she didn't lose faith after finding out about her condition. When asked how her life had been affected by her illness Dr. Thompson stated, "I am grateful for the experience. I was in my doctoral program at the time. It was as if God took me by the hand and said come on, we're going through this, and you're going to be fine. Even though I had to have nine months of chemotherapy treatments, I worked throughout that time. Great support from family and friends, and a

good attitude kept me."

Dr. Thompson hopes to inspire others with her story. She hopes that her message will help others to not give up and know that they can beat the disease. "Have faith, do what the doctors tell you to do, and keep a good attitude."

Of course the disease affected Thompson's family also. Unlike many victims, she had to be the rock for her family. "My mother and sister were more upset than I was," she stated. Yet, even with their fears, Dr. Thompson concluded, "They were like angels caring for me when I needed them the most."

Breast cancer survivor Karen Rogers, the mother of a UM student, has a similar story to tell. She was diagnosed with the disease in 2001. Ms. Rogers also went through chemotherapy and other radiation treatments. "The treatments were difficult, but with the help of God, my family, close friends and excellent doctors, I came through it," she said. At the time of her diagnosis, she was a Collaborative Special Education teacher at Tuggle Elementary School. After her surgery, she had a recuperation period of seven months and then returned to work. "I experienced good days and bad days, but I was determined to finish out my tenure and

get back to my students."

Rogers said she hopes that her story will inspire others as well. "My story will be a source of encouragement for someone else diagnosed with breast cancer." Rogers said she wants every victim to know that breast cancer is not a death sentence. Current research and treatments have become instrumental in fighting the disease, but family and support systems are also very important. Rogers' mother and three children were her main support system. During her most traumatic point, the chemotherapy, her family was her beacon of light. "The most traumatic point was the treatment. It was during this time that I lost my hair. My daughters took me shopping for hair accessories and in essence, took my mind off of my disease."

Thompson and Rogers both stated that their families were just as affected as they were while going through the disease. Dr. Thompson stated, "My mother and sister were more distraught than I was. I often had to calm them down." Ernestine Phillips, Rogers' mother, reflected back on that point in her daughter's life and what it taught her. "As a result of my daughter's disease, I've established a closer relationship with God," Phillips stated. "In addition, I've reassessed

my priorities and have established closer ties with my family." Her initial reaction to her daughter's illness was a state of disbelief because of conflicting information from doctors. However, after her daughter was officially diagnosed, Phillips had a major role to play in her treatment. "I read literature on different plans, conferred with doctors on available treatment plans, was present for all phases of the treatment plan and provided moral and spiritual support."

Rogers' daughter, April Rogers, felt the need to help others diagnosed with the same disease as her mother by participating in the 2010 Susan G. Komen race for the cure in Dallas, Texas. "Upon moving to Dallas, I decided to honor my mother by participating in the race for the cure. It was truly moving to see all of the breast cancer survivors and their family members," she said. Being a part of this event helped honor her mother and helped fund the search for a cure for the disease.

The University of Montevallo recently honored breast cancer survivors during the halftime show of a Lady Falcons basketball game. Thompson, along with Dr. Mary Beth Armstrong, was recognized along with several others who battled the disease and won.