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Breast Cancer Survivors Catch Lasting Companionship on Fly-Fishing Weekends

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Casting for Recovery, a Vermont-based nonprofit that provides complimentary fly-fishing retreats to breast cancer survivors, is seeking volunteers to start a community-based retreat for Illinois women.

Why? Because it makes a huge difference when breast cancer survivors gather in a serene setting to fly fish. Through Casting for Recovery, women relax, forge new friendships and find support, all the while learning a new skill with physical and spiritual benefits.

Since 1996, the not-for-profit has offered breast cancer survivors complimentary retreats at upscale resorts and lodges across the country. We all know someone who has had breast cancer, or maybe are a survivor ourselves. So how does fly fishing help?

Fly fishing gives a sense of calm and connection with the outdoors, and its gentle casting techniques help stretch soft tissue and muscle in areas affected by radiation or surgery.

This haven for women was the inspiration of breast reconstructive surgeon Dr. Benita Walton and Gwenn Perkins, a fly-fishing instructor. More than 4,000 women have attended the retreats. This year, nearly 1,500 trained volunteers will help plan and conduct 46 retreats in 30 states.

"Seventy percent of women who come through our program have never been in a support group," says Lori Simon, Casting for Recovery's executive director.

"They don't know the benefits of sharing their fears. They don't know how good it feels to be in the sisterhood of other survivors. We help them focus on a better quality of life and survivorship."

Each retreat is limited to 14 women—chosen through a lottery—because an intimate group helps foster friendship, support and sharing. Women are at all stages of treatment and recovery.

"Breast cancer survivors are an underserved population," Simon says. "We need to help these women get back into their daily lives with a sense of joy."

Go Fish

Women in the Chicago area can register for the next national retreat planned for September 12-14, 2010, at Skytop Lodge in the Pocono Mountains in eastern Pennsylvania.

The two-and-a-half day retreats are staffed by female volunteer nurses, counselors and fly-fishing instructors. Lodging, food and clinics are all free of charge, except for transportation. A counselor and either a registered nurse, physical therapist or physician attend each retreat.

The program relies on support from cancer centers such as Susan G. Komen for the Cure and corporate sponsors such as The Hartford.

For information or to register for a retreat, visit www.castingforrecovery.org or call Lori Simon at 802-362-9181.

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