



SUE HARRIS

## Center helps woman reclaim life after cancer

Gym? Never stepped into one before 2007. Exercise? Used a treadmill a few times after having child 25 years ago. Locker rooms? Didn't want fool with tricky combinations.

Sue Harris was dedicated to teaching, not to her health. For many years, she had been the principal of St. John Fisher School in Southwest Portland. She often passed the Mittleman Jewish Community Center where her students engaged in activities, but she had never gone inside.

Then, in August 2006, she had a mastectomy and complex breast reconstruction called TRAM flap surgery.

"Months passed before I could return to my job," said Harris. "I was overweight, had high blood pressure and symptoms were beginning to appear. That is when Cancer Care Resources and the MJCC became a part of my world."

It happened when the parent of a student she'd taught 15 years before showed up on campus unannounced.

"She had heard I was struggling," said Harris. "She said she thought there was something that could help me. It was called InPower, a program offered by Cancer Care Resources at the MJCC. That was the spark I needed."

The program is designed to help cancer patients recover more fully from surgery and treatment through fitness and exercise, Harris said. One hour of cardiovascular exercise and weight training is followed by meditation or guided imagery.

She met with "Laura and Rose" and "the stars aligned," she said.

Laura Rosencrantz, the creator of InPower, is a fitness instructor specializing in exercise for cancer patients at the MJCC and a member of the CancerCare staff. Rosemarie McDermott is an oncology nurse with CancerCare.

"I honestly didn't believe I had the strength and where to go to do the program," said Harris. "They said, 'That's why we're here—to help you build yourself up, help you get healthier.'"

Harris said Rosencrantz contacted doctors and physical therapists to make sure she would be exercising at the right level. The exercise program is tailored for each individual, she said.

"I started on mats with gentle exercise," said Harris. "At first I couldn't even get up by myself."

Then she progressed to equipment such as weight and rowing machines.

"This is my playground," she said. "The locker room is so lovely, and the lockers are user-friendly. It feels really natural for people like me who don't usually do this."

After her program ended in June, Harris said, she felt healthier than ever before.

"Even Laura and Rose would tell you they were quite amazed at the strides I made," she said. "I had lost 40 pounds, brought my blood pressure into the normal range

# MJCC: 'I feel like it's my place, my fitness center'

Continued from page 14

and lowered my cholesterol from high risk to low risk... The post-assessment showed I had improved my cardio by 81 percent and my overall strength and stamina levels by over 200 percent."

She said the program saved her life in a number of ways.

"Cancer is something that controls you—that's one of the toughest things about it," said Harris. "InPower put control in my

hands and made me feel I was doing something to get past the cancer experience."

Harris said the InPower program is made possible by grants and donations and is offered for about a dozen cancer survivors at a time at no cost to the participants.

Harris said the MJCC "donates the use of its excellent fitness center facilities for every InPower session."

"Without this amazing combination of expertise, compassion and donation to the cause, InPower would not be the incredibly

positive and productive experience it is," said Harris.

The Jewish Federation of Greater Portland allocated \$526,000 to the MJCC for fiscal year 2007-08.

The mission of the MJCC is to serve the cultural, social, educational, athletic and recreational needs of Portland's Jewish community. The beautifully renovated facilities include a complete state-of-the-art health club and a junior Olympic-sized pool. November's activities include Jewish

Book Month, First Friday Shabbat dinner and services, the "Ask An Expert Series" with Rabbi Ariel Stone, a Jewish Community Orchestra concert, and Jewish Cinema.

Harris said she plans to stay on as a member of MJCC.

"I feel like it's my place, my fitness center, because it saw me go from such a low place to such a wonderful place. I couldn't have imagined out of darkness would come this brilliant light, these blessings."