

The Beacon

FREE

Breast cancer survivor back in the saddle

By Carol Sorgen

In 1999, Patricia Artimovich was diagnosed with breast cancer. The treatment and recovery were, in her words, "grueling," but once she had begun to recover, Artimovich, now 59, began reflecting on what she wanted to accomplish in her life.

"It wasn't just the big things, but the small things I wanted to do as well," said Artimovich, an attorney and contracts manager for the Universities Space Research Association in Columbia.

Artimovich had been interested in horses as a young woman, but had let that passion lapse as she got older. "I decided that I wanted that back in my life," she said. "When I'm on a horse, I don't feel like someone who has had cancer."

Because one of the side effects of breast cancer treatment can be osteopenia (thinning of the bones), Artimovich's doctors advised her against jumping — the form of riding she had previously enjoyed most.

Instead, she took up dressage, a French

term most commonly translated as "training." Its purpose is to develop the horse's natural athletic ability and willingness to work — making him calm, supple and attentive to his rider.

Dressage is also a sport that attracts many riders as well as viewers, from amateur to Olympic level competitions. Artimovich compares watching a rider and her horse performing graceful and elegant dressage to observing a figure skater or gymnast doing her routine.

Raising money to fight cancer

Artimovich felt that she had gained so much through her association with these "gentle giants" that she wanted to find a way to open that avenue to others, and to utilize the dressage community to raise money for the Johns Hopkins Avon Breast Cancer Center for research and education. The center has locations in both downtown Baltimore and at Green Spring Station in Lutherville.

In 2004, Artimovich approached the nonprofit Potomac Valley Dressage Association, the second oldest dressage club in the United States, and arranged for the association to take a one-day dressage show and dedicate it and its net proceeds to the Johns Hopkins Avon Center. The event was called the PVDA Ride for Life.

Since then, the event has grown to a two-day show with more than 200 riders. Overall, the PVDA Ride for Life has raised more than \$320,000 for the center.

"We are very dependent these days on the generosity of others to fulfill our mission and goals of the breast center," said Lillie D. Shockney, its administrative director. "The Ride for Life event greatly supports our efforts so that more patients can become survivors of this disease, as well as receive quality of care at Hopkins, and through our training efforts, also elsewhere."

Ride for Life events

This year's Ride for Life will take place on Saturday and Sunday, June 25 and 26, at the Prince Georges Equestrian Center, 14900 Pennsylvania Ave., in Upper Marlboro, Md. The schedule of activities includes:

Dancing Horse Challenge, the weekend's highlight, on Saturday, June 26, from 6 to 8:30 p.m. (doors open at 5). This is a lyrical blend of dance, music, lights and equestrian prowess, featuring international and national riders and Olympians.

Immediately following the Dancing Horse Challenge is "Dancing in the Dirt," during which everyone in the stands can

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come down to the sand arena and dance to live music until 11:30 p.m.

Throughout the evening, guests can purchase food and beverages, shop for souvenirs, and visit the silent auction area to bid on such items as jewelry, artwork,

crafts, memorabilia, gift certificates and riding clinics. (For auction previews, visit www.pvdarideforlife.org.)

On Saturday night, a “Dancing with the Stars”-themed, black-tie optional gala kicks off at 5 p.m. with a cocktail reception and a strolling magician. Gala guests will have special seating for the Dancing Horse Challenge and can go back and forth from the show to the auction and the reception. Dinner will be served from 8:30 to 10:30 p.m.

In addition, guests can mingle with the riders and dance, either in the gala area where the band will perform or down in the dirt where the music will be broadcast.

On both Saturday and Sunday, from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m., visitors can enjoy an exciting competition among dressage riders, many who have been touched in some way by breast cancer. Several riders also will perform special demonstration rides and be available to meet visitors.

Patricia Artimovich created the dressage show Ride for Life to raise money for the Johns Hopkins Avon Breast Center. This year's events take place on June 25 and 26.



PHOTO COURTESY OF PATRICIA ARTIMOVICH

The weekend also will include children's activities, such as pony rides, face painting, horse arts and crafts, stick horse building, stick horse races, face painting and magic shows. A boutique with merchandise from more than 45 vendors will also be available.

Daytime admission to Ride for Life is free. Admission to the Dancing Horse Challenge is a \$20 per person donation; free for children under age 10. Discounts are also available for groups of 20 or more. Tickets can be purchased online at www.pvdarideforlife.org.

Gala admission is \$100; \$50 for children

under 12. All reservations must be made by June 17. Tickets can be purchased online at www.pvdarideforlife.org or by contacting Jeannette Bair at (443) 691-0390 or jeannettebair@hotmail.com. Children's gala reservations must be made by contacting Bair.

Though Artimovich has not achieved her own equestrian goal of riding every year on a horse of her own, the inspiration she receives from riders and Ride for Life attendees every year continues to motivate her.

“I look around and see a lot of life-giving potential,” she said.