

Annual Report 2024

Breast Cancer Support and Education for New York's Capital Region



Breast Cancer Support and Education

Message from the President



2024 has been a year of transition, growth, and renewed commitment to our mission. I am especially grateful for the extraordinary dedication of our Board of Directors and staff, who each put in extra efforts during what was truly a transformational year for To Life!.

After years of dedicated service, we bid farewell to our longtime Executive Director, Eileen Howe Bird, whose leadership has been instrumental in shaping To Life! into the vital resource it is today. We are deeply grateful for her legacy of compassion and excellence.

Throughout this year, I have been continually moved by our community's unwavering support. Our fundraising events—the Pink Ball and Toast to Life—and educational seminars—Beat the Odds and the Women's Health Conference—demonstrate that our community understands, wants, and needs To Life! Your engagement speaks to the heart of who we are as a community—people who care for one another in times of need.

Most importantly, 2024 marked a significant milestone in expanding access to our services. Through new partnerships with New York Oncology Hematology and Albany Medical Center, we are meeting people where they are in their cancer journey. These partnerships represent our commitment to ensuring that we're there for anyone in our community dealing with breast cancer, regardless of where they receive treatment. This is just the beginning of our efforts to break down barriers that keep people away from To Life!.

As we look ahead, I am thrilled to welcome Dr. Allison Burton-Chase as our new Executive Director. Dr. Burton-Chase brings exceptional experience and a deep understanding of the challenges faced by those affected by cancer. Her vision for expanding our reach while maintaining the personal, compassionate approach that defines To Life! fills me with excitement and anticipation for our future.

To our sponsors, volunteers, and clients—you are the heart of To Life!. Your trust, generous support, and willingness to share in this work make everything we do possible. Together, we are not just an organization; we are a community united in hope and the unwavering belief that no one should have to face breast cancer alone. Thank you for making 2024 a year of meaningful transformation.

Sincerely,

Rita Cox

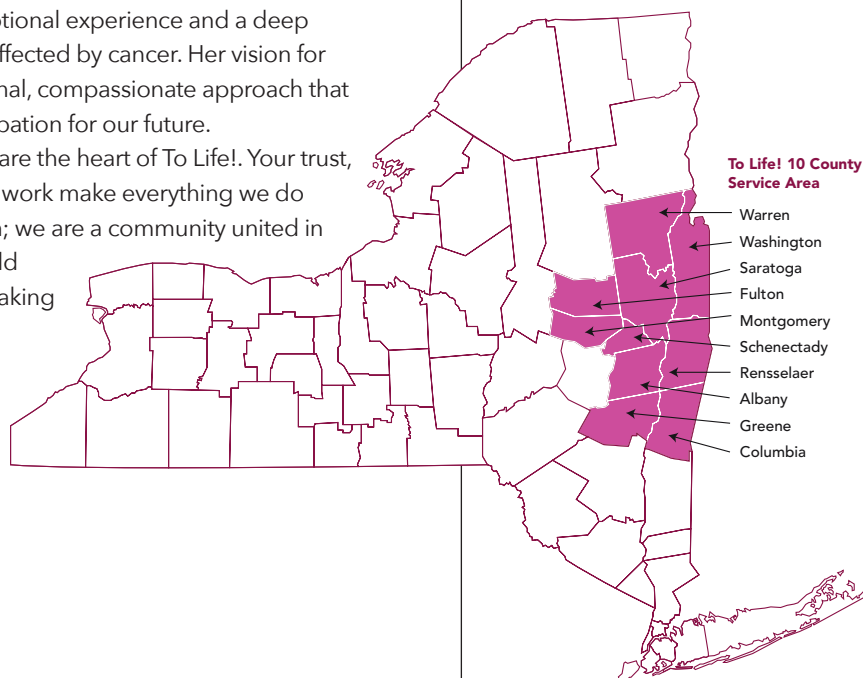
President, To Life! Board of Directors

To Life! Staff 2024

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Alice Duncan
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Hilary Miller
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Mara Ginsberg, *Founder,*
President Emeritus
Barbara MacDowell, *Secretary*
Kathleen Godfrey, *Treasurer*
Mary Bowen
Doug Conklin
Maureen DeRosa
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Holly Michaelson
Monica Minor



Community Impact

(# of people served)

To Life! provides direct services to individuals in the Greater Capital Region.



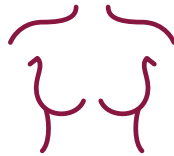
Education Programs

388



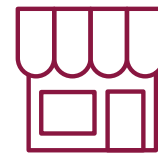
Support Groups & Peer Mentoring

370



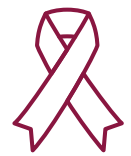
Breast Health Workshops

128



Boutique Services

588



Wellness Programs

265

Outreach

To Life's digital outreach informs the Greater Capital Region about our programs and services.

Website Visits

31,319

Social reach

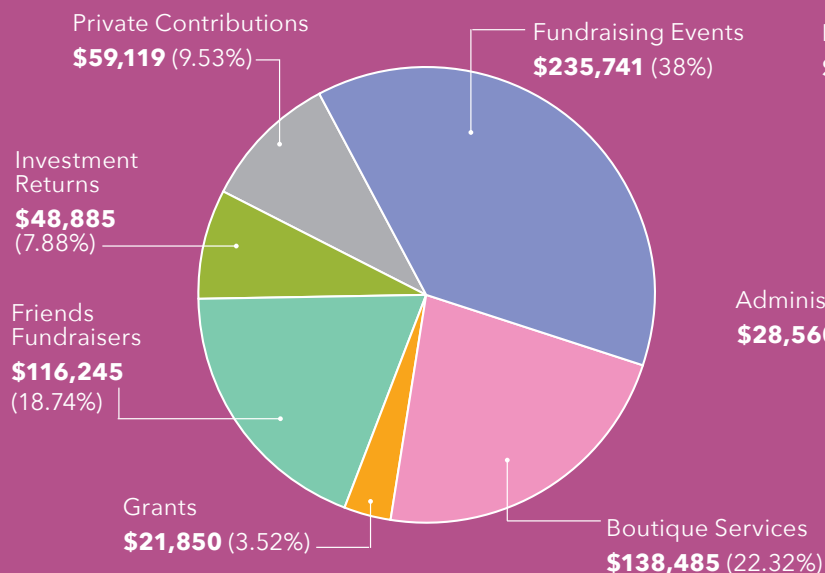
78,812

Email reach

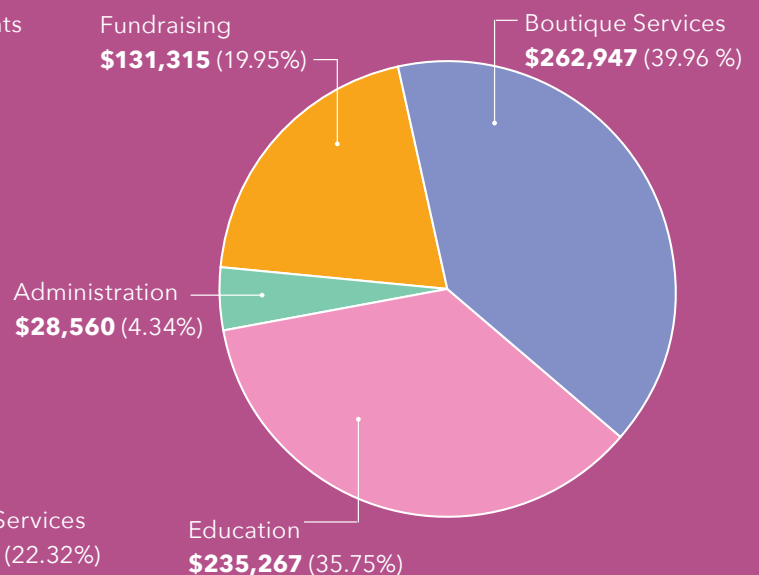
36,484

2024 Financial Report

TOTAL REVENUE \$620,326



TOTAL EXPENSES \$658,089



November 13

14th Annual Women's Health Conference Series

HOSTED BY ALBANY MEDICAL CENTER

"Exploring Positive Life Balance and Emotional Wellbeing During and After Breast Cancer Treatment"

This year's conference was held at the University at Albany,
School of Public Health campus in Rensselaer, NY.



Margarida Barroso, PhD
Professor at Albany Medical
College

Research Highlights
Related to Breast Cancer



Mary Beth Honsinger
NAMI President,
Capital Region

Situational Depression
and Anxiety vs. Disorders



Cheryl Syta
Medical Oncology
Nurse Practitioner

Healthy Eating and
Nutrition



Pierre Zimmerman
Meditation Teacher and
Cancer Survivor

Meditation Tools

ASK THE EXPERT PANEL



Joni Richter
Panel Discussion
Leader



**Dana Pleskovic,
LSW**
To Life!



Francis Ford, LSW
New York
Oncology
Hematology



**Kristen Lancio
Pink, LSW**
St. Peter's Health
Partner's Cancer
CenterHealth



Pierre Zimmerman
Meditation Teacher
and Cancer Survivor

Education Programs

August 13

Beat The Odds

“Overcoming the Challenges of Recurrence”

Dr. Edward Liebers, MD

(2024 Cynthia Shenker Memorial Speaker)



BEAT THE ODDS
A TO LIFE!
EDUCATIONAL EVENT



Dr. Edward Liebers, MD is a board-certified hematologist & oncologist in Saratoga Springs, NY with over 27 years of experience. He currently serves as Chief of the Division of Oncology at Saratoga Hospital Medical Group - Oncology/Hematology. His talk focused on the management of cancer recurrence in patients with a breast cancer diagnosis.



Dr. Ilya Gipp is currently the Global Clinical Leader for Oncology at GE Healthcare, in Atlanta, GA. His fields of expertise include medical radiology, healthcare management, and marketing. His presentation (EMPATHY) uniquely looked at current and future technologies and their application for improving the patient experience related to breast cancer.



Debra Nozik, LCSW has been involved with To Life! since its origins in 1998. First diagnosed and treated for breast cancer in 1992, she faced a recurrence and diagnosis of metastases in 1999. In 2007, she was asked to facilitate a new support group for women dealing with breast cancer. She now co-facilitates another support group for women dealing with metastatic breast cancer.

Supportive Wellness Programs: Supporting Whole-Person Health

This year, our wellness programs have continued to grow, offering a wide variety of experiences that support mental, physical, and emotional well-being. From yoga and meditation to painting, book club, and equine therapy, participants have found meaningful ways to relax, connect, and recharge.

New offerings include nutrition and cooking, fitness education, sexual health, and heart health—empowering our clients with practical tools for healthier living. In addition, we host educational conferences in a more formal setting with guest presenters offering their expertise and knowledge on subjects that inform our community, such as healthier eating and AI in medicine.

Our holistic approach ensures there's something for everyone, promoting self-care, creativity, and community at every step. As we move forward, we remain committed to making wellness accessible and inclusive for all.

Support Services

Monthly Support Groups

Amsterdam at NYOH Cancer Center - Patients, survivors and their caregivers discuss topics important to their journeys. Activities and guest speakers are often included.

Bi-Lingual group - One-on-one support and peer mentoring connections for those whose language preference is Spanish. Our bi-lingual educator manages this outreach.

MetaThrivers - Individuals who are dealing with advanced cancer or a cancer recurrence often face complex challenges. This group, led by a cancer survivor and an experienced group facilitator help individuals navigate the challenges ahead.

Newly Diagnosed/In Treatment - This group is a starting place for survivors to gather with others who are also dealing with a diagnosis. Facilitated by To Life! staff, this group meets monthly, offering a platform to address any and all questions that come with a breast cancer journey and the emotional challenges associated with their diagnosis.

Peer to Peer Mentoring - Engaging with a fellow survivor can offer a unique connection and perspective on a survivor's journey. To Life!'s extensive survivor network has assisted hundreds on their journey. In many cases, the peer mentor relationship develops into ongoing friendship.

Positively Living - The focus here is on the mental, emotional, and spiritual transition one goes through following a breast cancer diagnosis. We provide the education, tools and supportive community to work through this transition into a new phase of life.

Saratoga Body Positivity - Hosted by Saratoga Hospital and held at the Mollie Wilmot Radiation Oncology Center, this group focuses on improving how we see and feel about our bodies after a cancer diagnosis and treatment.

Saratoga Hospital - To Life!, in partnership with the Mollie Wilmot Radiation Oncology Center of Saratoga Hospital, offers a monthly support group for women affected by breast cancer, as well as interested family members/caregivers.

Young Survival Coalition - To Life! partners with the Young Survival Coalition (YSC) to support younger individuals dealing with breast cancer. YSC develops networks designed for breast cancer survivors diagnosed at age 40 or younger.

Community Events & Fundraisers

Our reach and visibility in the community is greatly impacted by friends who help raise funds for To Life! programs and services.

Friends Fundraisers

Academy of the Holy Names - Danielle Oberting
 Beck's
 Bethlehem Boys Soccer Booster Club
 Big Bethlehem Backyard Fundraiser - YMCA
 Kasandra Carda - Saratoga Spa Realty
 Circles - Sharon Fenno
 Dancing with the Stars of the Capital Region - Toni Howard
 Robin Gulay - Bare Blends, Glenmont
 Village of Green Island - walk
 Hannaford Bloomin' for Good
 Harding Mazzotti - Big Help Initiative
 Holy Names - Alexis Drislane Bake Sale
 Howe Caverns - Dragon Boat Festival
 Hype Socks - Bethlehem MS XC
 Iroquois Middle School Student Council
 J. McLaughlin
 Knolls Atomic Power Laboratory
 Jill Kovachick - Saratoga Clay Arts Chili Bowl
 Sarah Lindahl - The Mill on Round Lake
 MBellish
 Melissa Cantanucci - Christ the King Church
 Murphy's Pals
 Kevin Myers - Ribbon Café
 Niskayuna Youth Football & Cheer
 The NYS Forum - Reiter and Costopoulos
 NYSTEC - Think Pink
 Samantha Parker - The Heart of Homes Realty
 Pie a Phi

The Pig Bowl - Schenectady County Sheriffs and Schenectady PBA
 Remarkable Finish Hair Salon
 Jill and Lance Sharpe - Car Show
 Shenendehowa Varsity Football
 The Spinney At Van Dyke - walk
 Syliva's Fitness Challenge
 Tee-Off to the TaTas
 Toast to the TaTas
 Town of Waterford Dragon Boat Festival
 Wilton Emergency Squad
 Wolf Hollow Brewing Company



April 30

A Toast To Life!

Crown Plaza Desmond Hotel

The theme perfectly summarizes the evening, "We Shine Brighter Together." More than 200 attendees enthusiastically supported our Extra Mile honoree, Douglas Conklin, Ph.D., along with You're an Angel honorees Denise Buono and Melanie Wagner. Our Honorary Chair was Karen Fortsch, a longtime volunteer.

Awardees

EXTRA MILE AWARD



Dr. Doug Conklin, Director of the Cancer Research Center at the University at Albany School of Public Health is a renowned researcher, professor, and mentor. A goal of his work is to find components of cancer cells that may be directly susceptible to treatment, and be able to target them directly, rather than flooding the body with treatments.

YOU'RE AN ANGEL



Denise Buono was introduced to To Life! following her initial breast cancer diagnosis. As a wife and working mother of two sons, Denise finds time to be a steadfast volunteer for many activities and events, often stepping forward as a proud survivor and role model. She was recently diagnosed with a Metastatic recurrence and is now a member of MetaThrivers, a To Life! support group for women dealing with this situation.

YOU'RE AN ANGEL



Melanie Wagner specializes in helping women deal with the loss of hair due to chemotherapy. Whether working at her salon or as a To Life! wig fitter, she spends whatever time is needed to help women manage this challenging ordeal. Melanie has been an angel to more women than we can count.



October 18

The Pink Ball

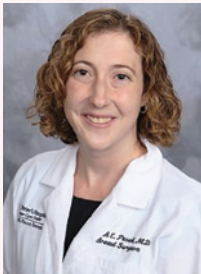
Glen Sanders Mansion

PRESENTED BY GODFREY FINANCIAL ASSOCIATES, INC.

The Pink Ball featured Colleen Kohler as Honorary Chair and Dennis Connelly as our auctioneer.

Honorees

EXTRA MILE AWARD



Sarah Pesek, MD, FACS has been at St. Peter's Hospital since 2015. Her medical training includes Johns Hopkins University and Penn State University College of Medicine. Her work focuses on optimizing cosmetic results of breast cancer surgery as well as survivorship issues.

COMMUNITY ADVOCATE AWARD



Barbara MacDowell, RN, a long-time To Life! board member and volunteer, was one of the earliest Oncology Certified Nurses in the US. She recently retired as Administrator for the Clinical Research Program for the Interventional

Radiology Department for Community Care Physicians, at Albany Medical Center.

Survivor Art Showcase

The reception featured curated creative works by breast cancer fighters and survivors. Each piece was displayed along with the artist's personal statement. The showcase made a powerful and dramatic impact on all attendees.





Message from the Executive Director

Like a lot of us, I suppose, I am not very good at saying goodbye. Yet, the reality is that I retired from To Life! on December 31st, closing the door on my tenure as the Executive Director. It's a position I have held since late in 2011. I never envisioned this would become my dream job, but the work truly took on a life of its own. I could never have known just how rewarding and important this work would be. It was one step at a time, getting to know staff, meeting survivors, engaging with fellow members of the cancer community, making new friends.

For To Life!, the mission of serving the needs of the breast cancer community has been and continues to be the priority. As the number of survivors in our population grows, so has the To Life! organization. You, our readers, our friends, our colleagues have also set a priority on enabling this much needed support.

This past year has been simply amazing, starting with the opening of To Life!'s third fitting boutique in Amsterdam. In partnership with New York Oncology Hematology and engaging a most wonderful, trained mastectomy fitter. We opened the doors with gusto, and the appointment book kept filling. Late in the fall To Life! opened another new location, this one at Albany Medical Center. These expansions reflect a strong spirit of collaboration and community support. Most importantly, they speak to adding convenience and a broader array of options for the survivor community.

If you have ever been part of a collective effort, you certainly appreciate the effort necessary to ensure all are on the same page and working in harmony. I will forever be grateful for Mara Ginsberg's vision for the creation of a supportive environment and localized service offerings for breast cancer survivors. I appreciate our Board President Rita Cox and the entire board for their ongoing supportive counsel, wisdom and genuine roll up the sleeves efforts.

Cheers to Allison, to all members of the To Life! staff, volunteers, community partners, and friends. Thank you for all you do.

Now I will repeat myself, let's not forget, we are in this together.

Warmly,

Eileen Howe Bird
Executive Director

Expanding Access to Services

To Life! started and ended the year by expanding access to our services. In January, we opened our third fitting boutique in New York Oncology Hematology's Amsterdam location. The response has been tremendous. We are grateful for our partnership with NYOH and our ability to take mastectomy fitting services to people where and when they need them.

Then, in December, we opened an on-site support location within Albany Medical Center's Breast Care Center, located at Albany Med's South Clinical Campus. This groundbreaking partnership allows us to meet with breast cancer patients and offer supportive counseling and fitting consultations in coordination with their medical appointments.

These new locations reflect our goal of providing services to people when and where they are most needed. Dealing with a breast cancer diagnosis is hard enough. These steps make the journey a little easier.



Boutique at NYOH Amsterdam location (top + right)



New on-site support location within Albany Medical Center's Breast Care Center (left + above)

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