

Hyannis dancer raises money for cancer research

Photo 1 of 1 | [View Enlarged Photo](#)



Susan Mendoza Friedman's organization, Dancing for a Cure, has raised more than \$100,000 for the Dana-Farber Cancer Institute in the past five years. "It's really been a very rewarding thing for me," Friedman said. "It's something I'm meant to do."

Cape Cod Times/Ron Schloerb

Text Size: [A](#) | [A](#) | [A](#)

[Print this Article](#) [Email this Article](#)

[ShareThis](#)

By **K.C. MYERS**
kcm Myers@capecodonline.com
May 23, 2011

HYANNIS — Susan Mendoza Friedman and Karen Schek have been best friends for about 40 years.

They roomed together for three years at Boston University. When they both had young children, they would meet annually for a weekend. It kept them close despite their distance geographically, with Schek in Round Ridge, N.Y., and Friedman on Cape Cod.

But in 2006, when Schek was diagnosed with stage 3 ovarian cancer, Friedman's life changed radically, too.

Schek began what would turn into six years of grueling chemotherapy. Friedman, meanwhile, decided to hold a fundraiser for research into a cure of ovarian cancer, which is notoriously difficult to diagnose in the early stages.

Friedman held a benefit recital at her dance studio, Dance Designs, in Hyannis, with 100 borrowed chairs and hopes of raising a few thousand dollars.

"We raised over \$5,000 and we were thrilled," said Kathleen Forest, who helped Friedman organize the first show in 2006.

From there, the gremlins of good seemed to take hold of Friedman, whose efforts to raise money for cancer research has become a second full-time job.

Her organization, Dancing for a Cure, has raised more than \$100,000 for the Dana-Farber Cancer Institute in five years, Friedman said.

Last week, Friedman won the Kathleen Roberts Creative Leadership Award from the Massachusetts Teachers Association. The award goes to an educator who serves the community with their creativity, community action and organizing.

"Susan is driven, she's determined, and she's so passionate about it," said Forest, who has stayed active on the Dancing for a Cure committee.

Friedman, 58, has glowing skin and the graceful movements of a dancer many years younger.

That's good because the women who make Dancing for a Cure so successful don't get much rest. Around the holidays, Forest said, volunteers are so busy they say "Merry DFAC" (the acronym of Dancing For a Cure) instead of "Merry Christmas."

But Friedman's time commitment is equaled only by the amount of inspiration she offers her young students and other women.

Her students perform "Nutcracker" selections and inspirational dances during "Dancing For a Cure," which runs for three days in December.

The young women learn so much about giving and about cancer, she said. The shows sell out, filling 350 seats at the Knight Auditorium at Barnstable High School nightly, Friedman said. Last year, they raised \$40,000 in three nights, she added.

Friedman also offers inspiration and friendship to the woman on the Dancing for a Cure committee. The 20-member committee has turned into "a sisterhood," Friedman said.

Originally, they organized to help others with cancer. Since then, nearly half have been diagnosed with one form of cancer or another themselves, said Friedman, who has never been diagnosed herself.

They suddenly find themselves as the featured speakers at the "Dancing for a Cure" events, and are able to lean on the support of a strong group of friends. "It's a magical night," Friedman said of the December performances. "There's a lot of crying, but also a lot of happiness."

Every dollar raised goes to research for breast and ovarian cancer, Friedman said.

This March, Friedman's group also held the first Dancing for a Cure dance marathon. More than 300 dancers boogied for four hours and raised \$10,000.

"It's really been a very rewarding thing for me," Friedman said. "It's something I'm meant to do. I do it for Karen. But I also do it for all of us. It really needs to be wiped out, especially ovarian cancer because it's so difficult to diagnose."

Back in Pound Ridge, Karen Schek, the original inspiration for Dancing for a Cure, continues to fight, she said in a phone interview this week.

Despite six years of chemotherapy and bouts of hospitalizations, Schek still works full-time as the director of an early childhood program. She's often sick, but has found Friedman to be a constant source of inspiration and love.

During the first year following the diagnosis, there would be a little gift in the mail every day from Friedman, Schek said. They talk three times a day, every day, Schek said. And of Friedman's work to raise money for cancer research?

"It means the world to me," Schek said. "The amount of love, energy and tenacity Susan puts into what she does, is just remarkable.

"It's the most incredible friendship imaginable," Schek continued. "She's been there for me every minute of every day for six years. That's huge."

HOME