

Early Detection Leads to Unexpected Breast Cancer Journey

By Sam Kennedy

LEHIGH VALLEY – Val Lewis, 57, of Danielsville, remembers the relief she felt last December when her genetic testing results came back. Offered at no cost through St. Luke’s University Health Network (SLUHN), the test showed no inherited mutations in the BRCA1 and BRCA2 genes – mutations that can significantly increase the risk of breast and other cancers. It was a moment of reassurance.

But just a month later, during her routine yearly screening mammogram, that sense of relief gave way to concern. Something didn’t look right. Follow-up imaging confirmed what she feared: breast cancer.

Val credits her gynecologist for encouraging her to stay on top of screenings due to her dense breast tissue, which can make cancer harder to detect. She had been alternating between ultrasounds and mammograms every six months – a proactive approach that made all the difference.

With the guidance of Dr. Trisha Kelly, her St. Luke’s surgical oncologist, Val chose to undergo a lumpectomy in April, followed by radiation in June. Eleanor Harris, MD, St. Luke’s Associate Cancer Director & Chief of Radiation Oncology, recommended a targeted treatment – accelerated partial breast radiation – which would reduce treatment time and protect healthy tissue.

“One of the most important facts about breast cancer is that early detection is lifesaving,” Dr. Harris said. “Breast cancer is highly curable when caught in early stages. Val’s story inspires other women to be proactive by having regular screening mammograms.”

Throughout Val’s journey, she found strength in the support she received – from her care team at St. Luke’s to a nurse navigator provided through her employer. That navigator helped her understand each step of her diagnosis and treatment, offering what Val described as “incredible care.”

She says she wasn’t always the easiest patient. “I ask a lot of questions, probably more than they bargained for,” she said with a laugh. “But the St. Luke’s doctors’ and nurses’ expertise, compassion and dedication have made this unimaginable journey feel a little more manageable. I truly feel I’m in the best hands.”

Now on a five-year course of hormone-blocking medication, Val is also planning follow-up reconstructive surgery after meeting with Dr. Alyson Melin, her St. Luke’s reconstructive surgeon. Val’s prognosis is excellent – something she attributes to early detection.

That’s why Val is passionate about sharing her story.

“Preventative breast screenings aren’t just routine checkups, they are a lifesaving tool,” she said. “The early detection of my breast cancer dramatically increased my treatment options. ... Whether you feel perfectly fine or have no family history, screenings can catch what you can’t feel. Prioritize yourself. Schedule your mammogram.”

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“By working together, we can help young people reach their full potential and strengthen our communities for generations to come.”

Generation Next currently operates in multiple Lehigh Valley high schools, engaging juniors and seniors through workshops, college and career readiness programs, and mentorship opportunities. The program is part of Community Action Lehigh Valley’s broader commitment to equity, education, and economic opportunity. To learn more about Generation Next or Community Action Lehigh Valley’s youth and education initiatives, visit www.communityactionlv.org.



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Saturday, NOV. 15 2025
10 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Forks Township Community Center
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Vendors representing a variety of government, not-for-profit, and private organizations will be on hand to provide information about the programs, services, and products they offer that are tailored specifically for residents living with special needs.

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THURSDAY, NOV. 13 | 6 TO 8 P.M.


Pen Argyl High School Auditorium
501 W. Laurel Ave., Pen Argyl, PA 18072

To register for this event, visit www.RepAnnFlood.com/events or call 610-746-2100.

For questions about this workshop, please call Rep. Flood’s office at 610-746-2100.



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