

# Vancouver breast cancer survivor collects, donates 250 bras

Support garments to go to nonprofit The Gift of Lift



Mary Frances Duggan of Vancouver, who has battled breast cancer, joins her husband, Dennis, as they drop off 200 bras at Dr. Allen Gabriel's office in Vancouver. Duggan collected 250 bras total, and they will go to The Gift of Lift, which helps women who are survivors of domestic violence, sex trafficking, low income, homeless or incarcerated. Amanda Cowan/The Columbian

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By **Wyatt Stayner**, Columbian staff writer

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Mary Frances Duggan never thought she'd have this many bras in her laundry room.



The 77-year-old Vancouver resident wasn't backed up on cleaning clothes; she was collecting clothes to help others. Duggan donated about 250 bras to Dr. Allen Gabriel's office in Vancouver a couple weeks ago.

Duggan felt the need to give back after being diagnosed with breast cancer in January 2018. She felt like she had great care from her medical providers (Gabriel performed her reconstruction surgery), and also terrific support from her family and friends.

"What can I do to give back? Because I've had the best doctors. They've been wonderful," Duggan said. "I thought, 'Oh, I could collect 100 bras.' I thought I'd just call a few friends and they could call a few friends. It just mushroomed. All of a sudden, my laundry room was absolutely full of these bras. I couldn't believe it. I was just shocked it worked out that way. That people were so generous."

The bras go to The Gift of Lift, a program of the National Women's Coalition Against Violence & Exploitation. The program collects and distributes "new and gently used bras to benefit women and girls locally, nationally and throughout the world," according to its website.

The bras are given to nonprofit agencies that help women who are survivors of domestic violence, sex trafficking, poverty, homelessness or incarceration. Many of the collected bras come from women who have had breast reconstruction surgeries.

Gabriel, whose office is a collection site for the program, said Duggan had a positive spirit throughout her battle.

"I was so excited. It was great. I had no idea," Gabriel said of the donation. "Here's a brave cancer survivor who has gone through chemo, a mastectomy and reconstruction, and now she wants to do something for everyone, which is amazing."

Duggan, who retired from teaching at Lincoln Elementary School in 2000, was initially taken aback and frustrated by her cancer diagnosis. She said she was "in a state of shock" and a little mad.

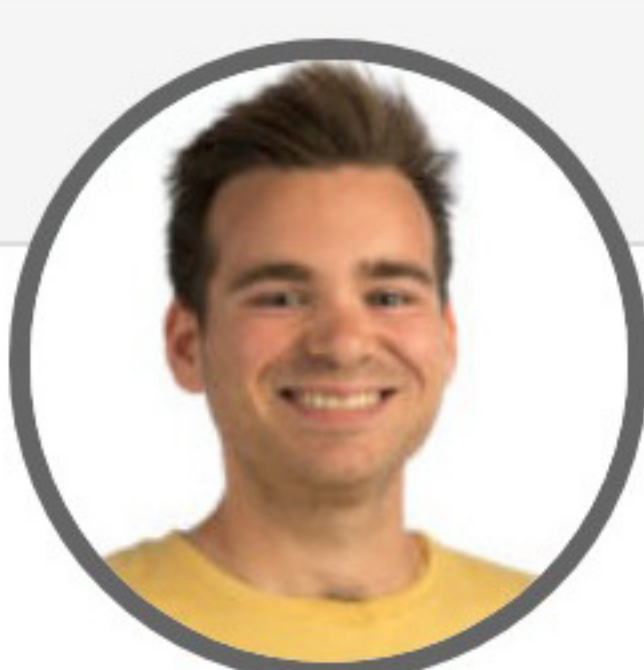
"I thought 'I've done everything right. This shouldn't be happening,' " Duggan recalled. "But it does. So you've just got to march on."

Duggan didn't give up hope, and she said the fact that she stuck to getting yearly mammograms was part of the reason why her cancer was able to be detected early. Duggan had chemotherapy, four surgeries and herceptin treatment, which she will finish this month.

"I decided I was going to do anything and everything to take care of this problem, which was such a shock," Duggan said. "I didn't know that older women got this, but one in eight do. I'd be a sorry case if I didn't stick with that mammogram schedule."

Duggan said Dennis, her husband of 55 years, was supportive, as were her daughters, Meghan, Maureen, Erin and Shannon, who all live in the Seattle area. They helped her collect a large number of the bras, as did Vancouver's Garside Florist — one of her daughters attended school with the owner. It might seem like it would take a while to collect hundreds of bras, but with the help of others, Duggan did the collection in about a month.

"It meant a lot to get that kind of support," she said.



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