

AZ Giving: A Foundation Honoring Anne Rita Monahan's legacy

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Anne Rita Monahan's life was cut short by one of the most debilitating female diseases—ovarian cancer. Now a foundation, honoring her legacy, educates women on its silent symptoms.



Anne Rita Monahan was a vibrant child taught to follow her dreams. Her passion for dancing the Irish two-step garnered her two-time Massachusetts State Champion and New England Regional State Champion awards. As a young adult, she earned a business degree from Boston College and a master's from Arizona State University. During the next 15 years, Monahan worked in advertising, overseeing some of the Valley's most awe-inspiring campaigns and, eventually, opened a gymnastics studio. Monahan's accomplishments didn't stop when she was diagnosed with the disease that would ultimately take her life: ovarian cancer. In 1990, Monahan became ill. She expressed feelings of abdominal pains, cramps, constipation and diarrhea. Her diagnosis: Irritable Bowel Syndrome. During the next 10 years, she visited doctors, all diagnosing her with the same bowel disease. But in 2001, around her 40th birthday, she visited yet another doctor—only this diagnosis was a referral to an obstetrician/gynecologist. The exam revealed tumors on both ovaries and the possibility of ovarian cancer. Within days, Monahan underwent several rounds of painful testing and surgery in hopes of confirming the root of her pain. In the end, she was diagnosed with late-stage ovarian cancer. During surgery, doctors realized the cancer had spread to a larger area than expected. Once semi-recovered from a hysterectomy, Monahan endured several rounds of chemotherapy which lead to a brief remission. A year and a half later, a routine doctor's visit showed that the cancer had returned. While her debilitating diagnosis had already resulted in the loss of personal relationships and her dream job—the gymnastics studio that she closed in 2002 due to her illness—it did not leave her defeated. Through it all, Monahan thought of others and how she could prevent women from experiencing what she was forced to battle. Utilizing her business savvy and her persistence, she founded the Anne Rita Monahan (ARM) Foundation in September 2007 with a goal of providing women with the necessary information they need to be proactive in their health. She also joined forces with Translational Genomics Research Institute (TGen), a Valley-based organization focused on developing early diagnostics and smarter treatments. She pledged \$100,000 to the research development of a noninvasive test that could provide early detection of ovarian cancer. "Anne always wanted to help women with ovarian cancer," says Rachel Busch, friend and now president of the ARM Foundation. In May 2009, Monahan lost her battle with ovarian cancer. "She fought it valiantly and did every kind of chemotherapy but, ultimately, it was just too late," Busch says. To keep Monahan's vision alive, the ARM Foundation will host its annual Tea for Teal event this month at the Sheraton Phoenix Downtown. With \$50,000 raised and \$50,000 to go, guests are invited to wear their favorite hats and sample a variety of teas, sandwiches and desserts.

To Learn More:

To learn more about ovarian cancer, its symptoms and the Tea for Teal event, visit www.anneritamonahan.org.