

Working Toward a KEY TO THE CURE

BY STACY FLANNERY



JENNIFER BAKER
PHOTOGRAPH BY JIM PRISCHING

Jennifer Baker was at a routine doctor's appointment last August when a lump in her breast was discovered. Determined as a cluster of cysts, it was suggested she have it removed if it continued to "bother" her. Like many other women, she had a family at home to care for and a classroom full of fourth graders to teach, so any kind of further investigation would have to wait until winter break. After two failed aspiration attempts, a biopsy was ordered. On December 30, 2010, Baker was told the cluster was triple negative breast cancer. "It was great timing," the resilient 34-year-old says with a laugh. "It was a Friday and the day before a major holiday. Nothing was open, making my husband and me just frantic."

It was clear to Baker and her family that action had to be taken, but where to start? Taking the advice of those who had come before her, Baker talked with several doctors and toured different treatment centers. "I found the treatment places to be so impersonal and isolating," she says. "All I could think about as I sat through these appointments and tours was the fact that the cancer was rapidly spreading."

Then Baker had an appointment with Dr. Leon Dragon at NorthShore University

HealthSystem (NorthShore) Highland Park Hospital, and her approach to the road that lay ahead changed in the blink of an eye. "He immediately made me feel better. He looked me in the eye and said, 'This is pretty rotten, but I know a lot of people who have beat this.' He gave me such hope."

After a tour of NorthShore Kellogg Cancer Center at Highland Park Hospital, with its private or communal treatment rooms, leading-edge equipment, and remarkable staff, Baker says there was no question on where the first leg of her cancer journey would begin. The "team" approach was the key factor to Baker's comfort. "Everyone there got to know me, and I felt that they genuinely cared about me," she explains.

As with any cancer management, multiple visits for treatment at NorthShore Kellogg Cancer Center became a part of Baker's life. The doctors, nurses, volunteers—even the valets that parked her car each time—came to know her. She never felt alone. "I finished my chemotherapy treatment in June, and I know this sounds weird, but I miss it. It was very social," Baker smiles. Now, she is working through the phases of reconstructive surgery after her double mastectomy and will soon begin radiation. She is choosing to continue all of her treatment at NorthShore Highland Park Hospital.

To celebrate women like Baker and support their triumphs in the face of adversity, Saks Fifth Avenue Highland Park and The Auxiliary of NorthShore at Highland Park Hospital announce their partnership once again for the 2011 Key to the Cure annual campaign, where *Sheridan Road* will serve as the proud media sponsor. On the evening of Thursday, October 20, Saks in Highland Park will come alive with supporters and survivors at a fund-raising event, sponsored by Aramark, to support NorthShore Kellogg Cancer Center and to ensure more people will have a positive experience like Baker's. "I hope I never have to refer anyone to Kellogg," she says. "But I would in a heartbeat."

All are welcome to attend the Key to the Cure Shopping event on October 20. To RSVP, call the NorthShore University HealthSystem Foundation at 847-926-5003, or visit northshore.org/kttc. □