



Press Release

Photo included

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Bikers Against Breast Cancer Helps Family Thank The Rose

HOUSTON – More than 500 riders, volunteers, and supporters participated in the 3rd Annual Bikers Against Breast Cancer (BABC) record-setting ride Saturday, May 7. And at least one new rider plans to make it an annual event.

Debbie Stokes has arthritis, so she never considered a long ride an option. But as soon as she heard the BABC ride would be benefitting The Rose, she immediately signed up. According to Debbie, her daughter Elizabeth is alive today because of the breast cancer organization that provides services for the insured and uninsured.

At 21 years of age, Elizabeth found a lump during a routine breast self exam. The Liberty resident had learned about the importance of breast health care when she was 19 and a t-shirt attracted her to an educational booth at Houston's annual Buzzfest concert. Since then, she's taken care of herself and encouraged her friends to do so as well. However, as a young mother, she told herself the lump and her needs could wait and decided not to mention it to her doctor. Elizabeth's father Larry had other plans.

Elizabeth's aunt (Larry's sister) is a 30-year survivor. He didn't want his daughter taking any chances, so he applied a bit of paternal pressure. When Elizabeth went for her six-week checkup after having given birth to son Aiden, she mentioned the lump. Aware that she was uninsured, her doctor also knew of the services provided by The Rose and referred her for a screening. A mammogram, ultrasound, and a biopsy later, she got the news from Dr. Dixie Melillo, her physician and the Co-founder of The Rose.

She had breast cancer.

Both Elizabeth and Debbie thought of her own child when the report was received. Blue-eyed Aiden inspired Elizabeth. Debbie confesses her first thought was "Why not me?" and described the experience as "the hardest thing a parent can see her child go through."

The Rose assisted Elizabeth in accessing the state-funded Medicaid Breast and Cervical Cancer Services Program. Soon she was insured and receiving aggressive rounds of chemotherapy at MD Anderson. She finished her last round March 7 and was pronounced cancer free on April 1.

"My mom never left my side," the now 22-year-old Elizabeth reports.

"She kept telling me, 'Failure is not an option,'" explained Debbie.

"I had an incentive – I wanted to watch my son grow up," Elizabeth concluded.

Inspired by Elizabeth's courage and tenacity, Debbie claimed her own victory when she completed the 45 miles on Saturday.

"I owe it to The Rose," Debbie noted. "I wish I could do more. I tell everyone about what a great organization The Rose is, because, unfortunately, it's still a secret to many."

On top of caring for Elizabeth and helping out with her grandson, Debbie plans to continue to be a vocal advocate for The Rose and for young women not having to wait until they are 40 years of age to get coverage for mammograms.

Totals for the event are still being tallied, but 2011 BABC ride looks to be another record-breaking year. The event has grown from 125 bikes raising \$10,000 in 2009 to this year's estimated 391 riders and 85 ghost riders, raising nearly \$50,000 for The Rose. A new opportunity called a "ghost rider" allowed for participation for those who would not be riding but who wanted to make a donation. In addition, more than 75 volunteers assisted with the registration, silent auction, and raffle.

"I applaud the incredible Bikers Against Breast Cancer Committee led by D'Etta Casto DeLeon for creating an outstanding event," said Dorothy Gibbons, CEO and Co-founder of The Rose. "Looking over that sea of bikes was amazing. And I celebrated as stories were shared, tears were shed, and laughter and music made for a great day. There aren't enough words to adequately thank the riders, committee, volunteers, and staff who made this fundraiser such a success."

Bikers Against Breast Cancer launched in the Houston area in 2009. The committee consists of volunteers, assisted by The Rose staff. In its three-year history, BABC has raised a total of nearly \$100,000 to benefit The Rose.

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Cutline: Debbie Stokes (left), mother of Elizabeth Stokes (right) and grandmother to Aiden, rode in honor of her daughter in the 3rd Annual Bikers Against Breast Cancer May 7 ride that raised nearly \$50,000 for The Rose, a breast cancer organization serving the uninsured and insured. Chair D'Etta Casto-DeLeon (center) has led the

volunteer committee for its three-year history.



Cutline: Debbie and Larry Stokes rode in the 3rd Annual Bikers Against Breast Cancer ride May 7 to honor their 22-year-old daughter Elizabeth's fight against the disease. Diagnosed last year at The Rose, Elizabeth is now cancer free.