

# MAN POWER

Marc Heyison's organization gives men tools to help them cope with breast cancer affecting the women in their lives

BY JOE BURRIS  
(SUN REPORTER)

**W**HEN MARC HEYISON discovered 15 years ago that his mother, Gloria, had been diagnosed with breast cancer, his initial response was to lash out.

The then hard-throwing third baseman in the Orioles minor-league system channeled all his anger, fear, grief and hopelessness into his car phone, which he hurled at his windshield with all his might.

That left him with a spider's web crack in his auto glass, but he still had a web of emotions yet to be untangled.

When Heyison later accompanied his mother to her chemotherapy treatments and noticed that most of the other women were there alone, he wondered if their sons, husbands or brothers were struggling as much as he was. Men, he reasoned, with an innate desire to fix things, might want no part of things they can't fix, while others feel unequipped to lend emotional support.

That's why in 1999, Heyison co-founded Men Against Breast Cancer (MABC), a Bethesda-based national organization that provides support services and programs to educate and empower men to be effective caregivers when breast cancer strikes a female loved one.

This weekend, the group will hold its second annual National Male Caregivers Conference at the Tremont Plaza Hotel, teaching men from more than 15 states ways to navigate the breast cancer crisis (Please see MEN, 4C)

## HOW MEN CAN HELP

Tips on how a husband or partner can help a loved one who is diagnosed with breast cancer:

- Gather information about treatments, doctors or alternative therapies.
- Keep a calendar of and participate in all medical appointments and treatments, when possible.
- Be the "ears" and notetaker during medical discussions and consultations.
- Listen to a partner's concerns or fears and share your own feelings openly.
- Be a buffer between well-meaning family or friends at difficult times.
- Arrange for household chores to be done by enlisting the help of family and friends or hiring help.
- Be an advocate in the community for research, fundraising and other efforts to fight the disease.

[Source: menagainstbreastcancer.org, British Myers Squibb]



When Marc Heyison's mother, Gloria Heyison, was being treated for breast cancer, he co-founded Men Against Breast Cancer, which adds a navy strand to the pink breast cancer ribbon for its symbol (above).

ANDRÉ F. CHUNG/SUN PHOTOGRAPHER; [RIBBON PHOTO COURTESY OF MABC]

## MORE INFORMATION

Find out about Men Against Breast Cancer at [menagainstbreastcancer.org](http://menagainstbreastcancer.org) or call 866-547-6222

## Building a support framework

BY JOE BURRIS (From Page 4C)

through problem-solving techniques and networking with men in similar crises.

"To use the baseball analogy, men need to step up to the plate," said Heyison, 45, an Adamstown resident. His care and support for his mother through her mastectomy and chemotherapy helped her through the ordeal; today she's cancer-free. Heyison says all men can assist their loved ones as well, and his organization aims to provide them with the tools for doing so.

"There are few absolutes in this world; this is one of them," said Heyison. "Men need to be there for the women in their lives."

### Whole family affected

After being drafted in 1983, Heyison played for the Orioles' minor-league affiliate in Bluefield, W.Va., before his career was ended by right shoulder injuries. Though baseball was once his passion, Heyison now spends most of his time spreading the word about a disease that, according to the National Institutes of Health, affects one in eight women and kills more women in the United States than any cancer except lung cancer.

Early on, Heyison discovered that men were looking for such an organization.

"Most of the concern for breast cancer is for the women; not too many people realize how a man's world is turned upside-down, too," said Daniel McGrath, 65, of Riva, whose wife, MaryEllen, 64, was diagnosed with breast cancer in April 2006. She had a lumpectomy and radiation and is now on medication.

It was Daniel McGrath who discovered the lump in his wife's breast even though it failed to show up on an earlier mammogram. He heard about MABC while accompanying his wife to her support group.

"The disease impacts the whole family," said Daniel McGrath. "Women have focus groups to channel their fears, but men don't have those types of things. They have almost the same fears and concerns as women, issues of what hospital is best, should you have chemo versus radiation, lumpectomy versus mastectomy, medical expenses. There's a whole series of things you go through when this cancer crops up in your life that you never had to face before."

### Understanding needs

Among the initiatives MABC uses to assist men is Partners in Survival, an educational workshop developed by Heyison, Matthew J. Localzo, who was then director of patient and family services at the Johns Hopkins Oncology Center, and Dr. James Zahora, former assistant professor of oncology at the Johns Hopkins School of Medicine.

Open to the public and co-sponsored by health care institutions throughout the nation, the workshop helps men understand the physical and emotional needs of their female partners and then helps train them on suitable ways to meet those needs. It also offers the Guy's Guide to Mammography, which explains the value and importance of effective mammography for women.

"We've seen clinical proof that in addition to timely quality medical care, having an educated and skilled male partner positively impacts the woman's mental well-being, which in turn enhances survivorship," said Localzo, who will lead the program at this weekend's Caregiver's Conference.

"We have several men returning this year," he added, "because the program works."

It serves as an outlet for men who once thought their only op-

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MARC HEYISON, CO-FOUNDER OF MEN AGAINST BREAST CANCER

tion was to internalize their emotions, which McGrath did for years.

"I kept it in, because I had to be strong. My friends and family, they've got their own problems," said McGrath, speaking from his home in Bowie. "I didn't want to drop this on them, and I didn't want to look weak to everybody, either. Especially to my kids."

But by merely coming together during workshops or conferences with others who share a common concern, the men ultimately feel comfortable enough to open up to other men. Heyison said the meetings deal with how to talk to one's children about the disease, as well as how to talk to doctors. He suggests that men work toward maintaining normalcy in their loved one's lives as they cope with breast cancer.

"You can overprotect as well," he said. "There are times when my mom wanted to cook, and my dad would say 'No, I'll cook. But if she wants to cook, let her cook. Give her that sense of normalcy so she feels she will get back to normal.'"

### "A good outlet"

Men who have become a part of MABC have found it invaluable. There are many like Barry Allen of Bowie, who farmed his emotions at a cost to his own health.

His wife, Jonnie, was stricken with breast cancer 10 years ago. She had a mastectomy and chemotherapy, but then the disease showed up in the other breast four years later. Before the second diagnosis, Allen had a nervous breakdown.

"It was a complete buildup of stressors and anxiety and things like that," said Allen. "Just before the breakdown I had changed jobs. I went from a job of 18 years of building maintenance for churches, where I could just step away for moments at a time, to a desk job, where you can't just go. See you later."

Allen sought therapy and ultimately heard about MABC, then signed up for last year's inaugural Caregiver's Conference.

"I remember checking in last year and receiving a bunch of materials from the MABC staff," he said. "I started reading the materials and immediately called my wife and started howling. It's exactly what I needed for so long—a good outlet to finally let go of all the emotion and pain."

And it has become a means of helping him weather the trials that still exist. His wife's cancer has spread to her liver and lungs. "Her cancer is not curable," said Allen. "She's been fighting very hard, but the options seem to be running out a bit. Every day brings something new, we just go moment by moment."

But Allen does so knowing that he has support from other men to help him through the days.

"The key for anybody supporting a wife or a loved one who has cancer or any other disease is you have to become selfish and take care of yourself first," said Allen. "You are so good to anybody if you don't take care of yourself first. With that comes the reality that you can take care of others."

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