

CHOCOLATE, TEA AND POCKET ANGELS

*“All I really need is love, but a little chocolate
now and then doesn’t hurt!”*

- Lucy (*Peanuts* by Charles Schultz)

The white boxes are filled with various comfort items – chocolate, tea, lotion, lavender sachet, a pocket angel – along with information and contacts for cancer support services.

In each box is a note that begins with: “This kit was been prepared for you by a small group of women who have all experienced breast cancer ...”

The box is tied shut with pink tulle ribbon and distributed to the surgeons who give them to women at the time of diagnosis.

Pam DiDente, breast cancer survivor and nurse, brought the idea home to Central Oregon from a visit to Alaska. Fellow breast cancer survivor Demy Schleicher gave the kit a home-grown flavor.

“Right away, before a patient leaves the surgeon’s office,” says Pam, “[this kit] lets her know there are women in the community who care and there is an organized support system available for her.”

From the ground up

Pam DiDente graduated from Seattle University School of Nursing in 1970 and later obtained her masters degree in Nursing from the University of Washington. She worked in various nursing positions until she was diagnosed with breast cancer at age 44. A 9cm area of DCIS (Ductal Carcinoma in situ), which had not been visible the year before, was discovered on a routine mammography. Pam had a mastectomy and a year later, similar changes were visible on mammography on her other breast. Pam had a mastectomy on that side followed by bilateral reconstruction. She is currently a 15-year survivor.

When Pam started thinking about returning to the workforce, she looked around for something she could feel passionate about. At one point she sat down with the Cancer Program Director at the local hospital and, with notepad and pencil in hand, began asking questions.