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Raising funds for breast cancer

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Naomi Levin is asking everyone to be a breast friend for one night.

She will be hosting a breast cancer benefit from noon - 10:30 p.m. July 31 at Telfer Park. Money raised will go to Sharsheret, a non-profit organization helping Jewish breast cancer survivors. Hebrew for "chain," Sharsheret doesn't turn any woman away. It helps them network with other women to get the best healthcare and deal with treatment and their lives during and post-cancer treatment.



Naomi Levin stands by raffle items for the Breast Cancer Benefit Concert. Proceeds raised will benefit Sharsheret, a non-profit giving emotional support to Jewish women suffering from breast cancer.

Staff photo by Hillary Gavan

"I got help from them when I had breast cancer.

Now I'm giving help to young women who don't know what they are up against. I speak openly and honestly to them," Levin said.

Although the event isn't until July 31, Levin is asking local businesses and individuals to donate raffle items and to help volunteer with the upcoming event. She's on the hunt for clowns, jugglers and more. She hopes to raise \$10,000.

She's already secured an extensive line-up of entertainment with blues, bluegrass, country and rock bands such as Glenn Davis and Friends, Turtle the Creek Ramblers, the Jamie Campbell Band and the Bobby Friss Band. There also will be a slew of 50-50 raffles, a classic motorcycle display and food vendors. For raffles Levin's secured a plasma TV, autographed football, sports tickets and more.

Levin has first-hand experience with dealing with breast cancer and Sharsheret. She was diagnosed with breast cancer at the age of 40 in 2001 and underwent chemotherapy and a double mastectomy. She was sick for two years, noting it took an additional four years after that to return to herself again. Now she exercises, eats healthy and hopes her cancer doesn't come back. She's part of an experimental study and had breast reconstruction. She shares her knowledge with other women learning to love their bodies again.

Levin had many challenges during her battle. She said she has an appreciation for bald people after losing her hair.

"It's cold when the wind blows and your head is nude. It's just a humbling thing to be bald," she joked.

She makes no bones about the fact her battle was a horrible ordeal she wouldn't wish on her worst enemy. Despite her six years of suffering, she said it was worth it, if it meant she could go on living.

"I would do it again if it meant having the life I have now. There's a lot of stories of people dying. It scares me every day," she said. "I'm really just happy to be alive. Living is the way to go."

Today Levin likes spending time with her two weimaraner dogs and motorcycles. She has a catering business, does some Web design and is a landlord. She advocates for early detection of breast cancer

and tells women to do self breast exams.

As a volunteer with Sharsheret, she counsels women dealing with breast cancer, letting them know there's life after the disease. In addition to dealing with treatment, many survivors have to deal with the loss of their breasts and potential reconstructive surgeries. Additionally, husbands, boyfriends and children need support from the organization after losing a woman to breast cancer.

Breast Cancer Benefit Concert tickets are \$4 in advance at the following locations: COUNTRY Financial in Janesville, Swedish Stone Massage in Clinton, Taco Loco in South Beloit, The Mouse Bar & Grill in Beloit and the Beloit Noon Lions Club. It's \$6 for an adult at the gate and \$5 at the gate with a nonperishable food item. For children it's \$2 at the gate and \$1 at the gate with a nonperishable food item. Children under age 6 are free.

For more information visit the website www.sharsheret.org or call 866-474-2774. To make donations call Levin at 608-346-4429.

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