



Gift baskets help lift the weight of cancer

Gregory Crofton
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SOUTH LAKE TAHOE - Each time Janna Adams returned home from the exhausting and sickening experience of chemotherapy, a wrapped gift was waiting.

"It definitely gave me something to look forward to," said Adams, 37, of Keller, Texas. "It's just a little pick-me-up. The support makes all the difference in the world."

Adams was the first member of the Chemo Buddy Club, an Internet business that offers gifts and inspirational messages for cancer patients who undergo chemotherapy or radiation treatments.

The Chemo Buddy Club went on-line a month ago and is run by Janna's mother, Judi Sparrow, out of her Zephyr Heights home along with Judi's sister, Joy Becker, out of her Bedford, Texas home.

Joy came up with the idea for the club after a doctor ordered a regimen of chemotherapy to treat Janna's breast cancer. It was the second time in two years the family would have to deal with the disease. Judi was diagnosed with breast cancer a year before her daughter, but it was diagnosed early enough that she did not require chemotherapy or radiation.

"This was the first time I ever really felt helpless. If Jan needed financial support I'd jump to it, but with cancer there was nothing I could do," said Joy, 55, who lives about 15 miles from her niece. "This gave me a chance to kind of walk the journey with her."

Hair loss was one side effect of the three cancer-fighting drugs fed into Janna's bloodstream every two weeks for six months. She wore a cloth cap, known as a chemo cap, to cover her head.

Today Janna's mom, Judi, creates chemo caps with a sewing machine and includes them in a gift basket. The baskets either can be a one-time get-well gift, or be customized to accommodate the duration of chemotherapy or radiation treatments.

"If you have 12 treatments, a basket will come with 12 individually wrapped gifts to correspond with each treatment," Judi said. "So when you come home from the first treatment you can open it."

Another gift offered by the club is a teddy bear wearing a chemo cap. The bear comes with the message: "As you can see from your chemo cap we're in this together! So, hang in there, and remember, you're never alone in this journey."

The last gift basket Judi sent out was for a woman in Reno, but since starting the business six months ago packages have gone out to other places in Nevada, California, Texas, Colorado and Idaho.

"Every time they look at the basket it gives the patient the feeling that somebody is thinking about them and cares for them," said Judi, 56, who moved from Texas to Lake Tahoe in 2000. "Everything we do is very positive and uplifting."

Once the business establishes itself, the sisters said they will consider applying for nonprofit status so their operation can grow and reach more people.

"We would like to really look into that and probably will in the future," Judi said. "It's just so new we're just overwhelmed getting the business off the ground."

The Chemo Buddy Club also delivers "pink ribbon" breast cancer jewelry to cancer patients and end of treatment celebration gift

bags. All of the pins sent out have been worn by women who survived breast cancer. Sparrow came up with the idea after a nurse gave her daughter a pin worn by a breast cancer survivor.

Orders from the club can be made by phone at (775) 586-1066 or at www.chemobuddyclub.com. Judi and Joy said that as far as they know no other gift basket company exists for cancer patients.

Chemo Angels is a nonprofit corporation based in California that assigns volunteers to cancer patients. The job of an angel is to send the patient a card or small gift every week. Chemo Angels can be found at www.chemoangels.com.

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[BACK](#) 