

## CONTENTS

# The Accidental Advocate

BY KATHY LATOUR

Anyone who has seen Dale Eastman in action in the halls of the U.S. Congress or the Texas Legislature would be surprised to hear her describe herself as an introvert who had little self confidence and was terrified at the idea of public speaking. Of course, that was before Eastman was diagnosed with stage 3 breast cancer in 1990 at age 49, an event that turned the travel agent and mother of three college-aged children into a driven advocate for women with breast cancer.

Eastman recalls her frustration and anger at the diagnosis, particularly since she had been carefully monitoring her breasts since age 32, due to dense tissue and suspicious areas.

“Even after they did the biopsy, they were telling me they were sure it was nothing,” Eastman says. But it was something: two separate tumors and five positive nodes. Eastman struggled through treatment and then decided she had to do something to help the women who would follow her. After hearing a speech from a National Breast Cancer Coalition advocate, Eastman says she knew she had found her calling.

“I just chose to look outside myself to see how I could help other women,” Eastman says.

She turned to the National Breast Cancer Coalition for education on breast cancer advocacy, attending Project LEAD, Team Leader, and the Advocacy Training Conference to learn about the tools necessary to become an effective advocate. The trainings gave Eastman the confidence she needed to engage in political advocacy and effect change that would impact breast cancer and access to care.

Eastman soon became a recognized leader in state and national breast cancer issues. She was involved with passing a bill providing for reconstruction after mastectomy and helped with the passage of the Breast and Cervical Cancer Prevention and Treatment Act. She also spearheaded an Avon grant that brought mobile mammography back to San Antonio.

By 1992, Eastman was one of four women who founded the Alamo Breast Cancer Foundation, whose mission is to eradicate breast cancer through promoting and funding research and to improve access to high quality screening, diagnosis, and treatment. In addition, the group works to increase the involvement of those living with breast cancer in research and legislation.

Eastman was also instrumental in creating the San Antonio Breast Cancer Symposium Advocate Scholarship Program, which brings advocates from around the world to the annual symposium to become educated about recent breast

cancer research in order to disseminate the information to their local organizations. Since its founding in 1997, around 400 advocates from around the world have completed the program.

## A Political Pro

From political neophyte to savvy politician, Eastman's latest policy accomplishment was this year's passage of SB 39 by the Texas Legislature, which requires health benefit plans to cover the routine costs of care for a patient enrolled in a clinical trial, including any medically necessary health care services, such as doctor visits, hospital stays, tests, and X-rays for which benefits would be provided to a patient if the patient were not enrolled in a clinical trial.

Eastman began working on SB 39 in 2007 when she learned that Texas was not one of roughly 24 states that required insurance companies to cover basic costs.

"We read through every one of the bills in the states that had it—a comprehensive task—and framed the bill based on the ones that were out there," she says.

They then asked a number of physicians in the medical community, as well as the American Cancer Society, for their buy-ins before taking it to a well-respected Texas legislator who they knew would help them frame the bill.

"Politicians have to be educated, so we delivered, and then answered all the questions," Eastman says. The bill wasn't passed in 2007, so Eastman and her crew looked at all the barriers presented by those against its passage and began working on them. "We lobbied the lobbyists," she says. In 2009, the bill passed.

But it didn't stop there. Eastman, now the Texas field coordinator for the National Breast Cancer Coalition, is working along with another advocate from the Alamo Breast Cancer Foundation to help other advocates who want their states to pass similar bills.

Once that is accomplished, she will look for her next target, and, once found, it will receive her undivided attention until she has won, yet again, for the women of Texas facing breast cancer.

*This article is a part of CURE's 2009 San Antonio Breast Cancer Symposium coverage. To read more articles from SABCS 2009, visit [sabcs2009.curetoday.com](http://sabcs2009.curetoday.com).*