

Philanthropy Profile

Mobile Mammography: Driving Preventive Care for Underserved Women

Since its inception in December 2007, the Kay Yow Cancer Fund has raised almost \$8 million and has awarded grants totaling more than \$2.7 million in support of cancer research and clinical trials of experimental drugs, and future research grants are currently under consideration. The fund was founded by its namesake, Kay Yow, a Hall of Fame women's basketball coach who led NC State to more than 700 wins and led the US Olympic team to gold at the 1988 Olympic Games in Seoul, South Korea; Yow was also inducted into the Naismith Basketball Hall of Fame and was the recipient of the first Jimmy V ESPY Award for Perseverance. Yow was first diagnosed with breast cancer in 1987, and she died of the disease in 2009.

Yow believed that her life was extended by her participation in experimental trials, and she appreciated her good fortune in being able to receive high-quality care from cancer specialists in the Triangle area. She wanted to give other cancer patients the same opportunity to access experimental drugs; in keeping with this wish, the majority of grants awarded to date by the Kay Yow Cancer Fund have gone to research projects coupled with clinical trials. The Kay Yow Cancer Fund partners with The V Foundation for Cancer Research and its scientific advisory board to solicit, review, and award research grants.

In 2012, however, the Kay Yow Cancer Fund decided to contribute to a new kind of venture. Joining forces with the Rex Healthcare Foundation, the Kay Yow Cancer Fund decided to support the Rex Healthcare Mobile Mammography Unit. Although this project is a departure from the organization's efforts to support cutting-edge research, the decision to participate in this project also stemmed from Yow's vision and mission for the fund. Nora Lynn Finch, president of the Kay Yow Cancer Fund and longtime friend of Yow, explained that Yow gave the board clear and direct instructions before her death: "Research for the cure. Research for drugs. Serve the underserved." The mobile mammography project was a way to fulfill the third prong of

Yow's directive, so the fund's leaders were eager to become involved.

The Kay Yow Cancer Fund partnered with Rex Healthcare to acquire an advanced mobile mammography system for a mobile clinic. The mobile clinic, affectionately nicknamed "The Coach," is painted bright pink and features a towering portrait of Yow on its side. With the addition of this mobile clinic, Rex Healthcare's mobile mammography unit now includes 2 vehicles that canvas 17 counties in the Piedmont and Eastern regions of North Carolina. By traveling to local businesses, churches, schools, and civic groups, these vehicles remove the barriers of time, transportation, and resources that otherwise prohibit women from receiving these vital screenings.

Angela Harris, development officer for the Rex Healthcare Foundation, reported that the mobile mammography unit provided a total of 5,078 mammograms in 2012, with 1,952 of these mammograms being provided free of charge to women who did not have health insurance or who had prohibitively high deductibles. Mammograms are critically important because early detection of cancer greatly increases the chance of successful treatment—a fact that Yow understood well. Before her diagnosis in 1987, Yow's busy schedule caused her to delay seeing a doctor; after the team physician insisted, however, she finally underwent a mammogram. That mammogram was positive for a small mass, but thanks to its early detection, Yow was able to start treatment right away. Had she delayed her screening, the outcome might have been very different.

At the time of her diagnosis, Yow faced the difficult decision of whether to undergo treatment quietly or to go public with her battle. When Yow

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was first diagnosed in 1987, many still considered breast cancer to be a taboo topic, and most women chose to keep their struggles with the disease private. Yow had reasons to take her fight public. As Finch explains, "Kay was fine with people being private, but she knew that her purpose was higher than coaching basketball. Kay understood that her disease and battle provided an opportunity to serve others by taking her fight public." Today, great strides have been made in raising awareness about breast cancer—thanks to the efforts of Yow and organizations like the Kay Yow Cancer Fund and others—and each October a range of events and fundraisers are held in recognition of Breast Cancer Awareness Month.

Yow was open and public about her experiences from her first diagnosis; as time passed, her influence as a leader for the cause continued to grow. Finch believes that Yow really began to hit her stride in 1996, when both Yow and Finch served on the executive committee for the US Women's Open Golf Championship at Pine Needles Lodge and Golf Club in Southern Pines, North Carolina. That year a unique new model was employed to combine the tournament with a charitable cause, and the event was used to raise money for breast cancer research. According to Finch, the experience

was instrumental for Yow because "it gave her the platform to articulate a message of women's golf, North Carolina, and breast cancer." Following that tournament, Yow established a number of annual events to raise money and spread awareness about the disease, including the Hoops 4 Hope NC State basketball game, the 4Kay Golf Classic, the Play 4Kay national initiative, and the 4Kay Run during the Women's Final Four.

The Rex Healthcare Mobile Mammography Unit is more than just a vehicle to deliver cancer screenings to the underserved; it is also one more way in which the Kay Yow Cancer Fund is raising awareness about breast cancer and the importance of mammogram screenings. "We get calls all the time from people who say 'I was driving down I-40 and saw the RV with Coach Yow on the side!'" says Susan Donohoe, Executive Director of the Kay Yow Cancer Fund. Rumbling across North Carolina, "The Coach" is a fitting tribute to Yow's larger-than-life legacy in the state. **NCMJ**

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