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## ‘I am a survivor’

Inspiring stories fill the room at Sturdy’s 19th Celebration of National Cancer Survivors Day

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FOR THE SUN CHRONICLE

**ATTLEBORO**  
Cancer survivor speaker Jean Lenk admitted to tossing her invitation to Sturdy Memorial Hospital’s 19th annual Celebration of National Cancer Survivors Day in the garbage upon receiving it a few weeks ago.

“I didn’t feel like a survivor,” Lenk said. “I thought a survivor was someone who had five years of clean stands. I thought a survivor was someone who no longer had cancer, and that’s not me. I’m right in the middle of my battle.”

### Online

Watch a video of the 19th annual Celebration of Cancer Survivors Day at [thesunchronicle.com/local\\_video](http://thesunchronicle.com/local_video)

Sturdy’s annual celebration for  
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MARK STOCKWELL / THE SUN CHRONICLE

Three-year cancer survivor guest speaker Jean Lenk, right, is hugged and congratulated during Sturdy Memorial Hospital’s 19th annual Cancers Survivors Day held at the Attleboro Elks Lodge Saturday.

# **SURVIVORS:** Inspiring stories fill the room at Elks

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National Cancer Survivors Day was held Saturday at Attleboro Elks Lodge, where cancer survivors and some caregivers packed every table in the Golden Antler Room.

Lenk was one of two cancer survivors who was asked to speak during the celebration.

She learned a new definition for cancer survivor when Sturdy Memorial oncology program and clinical manager Karen Messier gave her a call to follow up on the invitation.

"Yes. I am a survivor because I've been diagnosed and I'm still here," Lenk said. A room of applause followed.

Lenk, who said she served as the pastor of First Congregational Church of Stoughton before her cancer diagnosis, received news that she had stage four cancer diagnosis during Holy Week last year.

"I did manage through the Sunday worship two days after getting a diagnosis, and I preached resurrection," Lenk said. "And then I went home, and my former life ended, and my new life as a cancer patient began."

Since then Lenk's life as a mother, pastor and wife may have been interrupted with biopsies, surgery and chemotherapy, but she still manages to live some of her life on her own

**'It makes you realize you only have a short time on this Earth and that you should walk carefully and walk full and thank God every day and every morning. Every day is a gift; make it a masterpiece.'**

Cancer survivor Donna Thompson terms.

Lenk has become known for her unique hair colors.

"Sometimes my hair is purple. Sometimes it's pink and sometimes it's teal," Lenk said.

Like Lenk, event attendee Donna Thompson of Norton took her cancer diagnosis as a sign to live life.

Thompson, who has been living with cancer for 22 years, said her diagnosis changed her life for the better.

"It makes you realize you only have a short time on this Earth and that you should walk carefully and walk full and thank God every day and every morning," Thompson said. "Every day is a gift; make it a masterpiece."

Cancer survivor speaker Susan Suvall spoke about her diagnosis with multiple myeloma in 2007 and her long journey with the disease.

Suvall is currently enrolled in a

clinical trial for the disease and said she hopes to become an advocate for multiple myeloma.

The event also included a buffet lunch, raffles and a keynote speaker Peter Adzima, who shared a story about his battle with hepatitis C through speech and song.

## **Event brings people together**

Messier said the purpose of the event is to let cancer survivors know they are not alone.

"It helps people know so many people survive and live with cancer. You have no idea until you start to come to these events how many people are affected by cancer," Messier said.

"It's hardly a person you can meet that doesn't know someone else who has had cancer and is dealing with it, so it sort of gives people a sense camaraderie and support."

The event did this for attendee Linda Carlson, who was first diagnosed with cancer in 1993.

Carlson called the event "inspirational."

"I think that's the best word because just the sheer number of people in one room who are survivors is just inspiration to keep fighting the fight," Carlson said.

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