



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Patty Ritchie

Support in the North Country

SENATOR PATTY RITCHIE January 24, 2020

| ISSUE: **CANCER SURVIVORS**



Senator Ritchie's Weekly Column

Just a few months ago, several dedicated individuals in our community were honored in Watertown at the "Community Health Hero" awards, hosted by area health care organizations the Fort Drum Regional Health Planning Organization and the North Country Health Compass Partners. The annual event recognizes those who go above and beyond in their communities to help improve the health and wellness of others.

This year, three individuals were honored—Anna Platz of Lewis County, Dr. Rohit Barreto of St. Lawrence County and Dennis Crowley of Jefferson County. I was especially touched by the efforts of Mr. Crowley, a 74-year old retiree who was instrumental in establishing Jefferson County's only cancer support group.

Ten years ago, Dennis Crowley thought he was as healthy as an ox. However, in 2010, he went for a checkup and was advised to get a PSA test. It was a recommendation that would lead to the discovery of prostate cancer, and an aggressive form of it. In the years that followed, he endured numerous surgeries, 39 radiation treatments and hormone therapy. It left him feeling as he describes, bitter and depressed.

One of the hardest parts, Mr. Crowley says, was not having anyone in his life who understood exactly what he was going through. According to him, the loss of dignity he felt was enough to take down the strongest of people.

Throughout New York State and the country, there are peer support groups dedicated to those battling cancer. According to Mr. Crowley, historically, they had not had much success in rural upstate New York—so he began his own with the thought that there must be others, like him, looking to talk about all they were going through.

Through his efforts, the group “North Country Cancer Support” was established. They meet twice a month at the Downtown YMCA in Watertown, in an effort to support those battling all cancer types, stages and phases. It is a place, he says, to let go of the ‘I am alone’ mindset, bond with others and to just share your story. The meetings and the programs Mr. Crowley has helped build are all free of charge.

The support group has now grown to include a fitness program for cancer survivors, also at the Downtown YMCA in Watertown, called “Livestrong at the YMCA” and a new program

that begins February 10th, called “Take Control of Your Life,” which provides people with the tools they need to improve their health, while battling a chronic disease.

Today, Mr. Crowley is working diligently to get the word out about the group and its programs to let those who are battling cancer know they do not have to do it alone. If you or someone you know would like more information on the North Country Cancer support group, or Mr. Crowley’s other programs, as well as other programs throughout Central and Northern New York, you can contact Mr. Crowley at dennisecrowley@hotmail.com.