

# Omega Alumna Julie Shrell Raises

**J**ulie Genecov Shrell (Omega) always worried she would end up with breast cancer someday – her paternal grandmother had it twice. “I needed to know if I was at risk so I went to a breast cancer specialist 10 years ago,” the Dallas native says. After reviewing the assessment she completed, the doctor assured her that she was not at risk.

So when Julie began experiencing unusual pains in her stomach in 2010, she figured she had a bladder infection. A couple of doctor visits and tests later, she received a call from her doctor to come into his office that very day – along with her husband. “I figured the news wasn’t great,” she admits. The doctor had found some abnormalities but actually suspected it was endometriosis. But when he discovered Julie was of Ashkenazi Jewish descent he recommended a hysterectomy that very week. Julie sought additional

opinions. “No one thought it was cancer and they did not urge me to have the surgery immediately,” she says, “so I put it off. It was a busy fall with activities for her then high school senior daughters, twins Marissa and Simone, and son Gavin, then 13.

Surgery day arrived. “I had a feeling something wasn’t right,” Julie admits. Her premonition was correct. She had Stage 3 ovarian cancer. And much to her surprise while undergoing treatment, Julie learned she was a BRCA gene carrier – a genetic marker inherited from her paternal side of the family. Children have a fifty-fifty chance of inheriting the gene from either parent - not just on the maternal side.

Following seven rounds of chemotherapy, Julie’s cancer is now in remission. Unfortunately ovarian cancer often returns and Julie decided to fight back.

Through her ordeal, Julie met two women also dealing with ovarian cancer at various stages and the three decided to launch a fundraiser to raise money for research for the cancer commonly known as “the silent killer.”

*“Our mission is to help women increase their chances of survival by raising money to fund programs for better treatment options, effective early screening, symptomatic and genetic pre-disposition awareness and a cure.”*

**Jill Bach (Alpha Epsilon)**, Helen Gardner (an SDT) and Julie partnered with Ovarian Cycle, an Atlanta organization, to sponsor the first ever Dallas Ovarian Cycle Ride (an indoor spin cycling event) in February 2012. They raised over \$300,000 for the Clarity Foundation and Ovarian Cancer Research Fund for their research programs. Yet while the women were ecstatic with their success, they were not content with merely sponsoring a single yearly fundraiser.

This past summer, the three survivors, now joined by a fourth, Lynn Lentscher, an Alpha Phi, founded the *Be the Difference Foundation*. “Our goal is to really be the difference in the fight against ovarian cancer by sponsoring awareness events and funding the resources that are really making the difference to find a cure,” Julie says.

With September approaching - Ovarian Cancer Awareness month – Julie decided to create some awareness on her own and challenged friends and family to paint their toes teal –



*Pictured, left to right: Jill Bach, a five year survivor of stage 4 ovarian cancer and BRCA positive; Helen Gardner, a four year survivor who just had her first month with no evidence of disease; Lynn Lentscher, a 14-year survivor with stage 4 cancer and Julie Shrell. Editor’s note, Jill’s daughter, Michelle is a Phi at the University of Florida.*

# Awareness for Ovarian Cancer



*Julie Shrell, left, with her daughters, Simone and Marissa.*

the official color of the fight against ovarian cancer. A Dallas native, Carey Fitzmaurice's Teal Toes.org, foundation was the inspiration for the Teal Toes challenge. "I love the color teal and I painted my toes and began challenging everyone I knew to do the same," Julie says. And she sweetened the deal by promising she would personally donate 50 cents to her new foundation for everyone who sent her a picture of their blue toes.

With over 1000 Facebook friends and her followers on her Caring Bridge site, teal toe pictures began trickling in. And that's when Julie's daughters, **Marissa Shrell**, now a sophomore at Indiana University (IU) and a member of **Epsilon Epsilon** Chapter along with her sister, Simone, an SDT, also at IU, and their sorority sisters took up the challenge.

"I started getting teal toes from all over

the world – from Israel, Greece and other countries. People who knew me sent me pictures and then their friends sent me more pictures. Jimmy Buffet's daughter sent me a picture of her toes," Julie recalls. Men even got into the action – 57 IU AEPi pledges painted their toes teal. In the end, Julie counted 407 sets of toes painted teal. And suddenly her promised 50 cent donation had grown. "A friend of mine matched whatever I did," Julie says. "Then one of my pledge sisters said I will do two dollars for each picture up to \$1000 and others chimed in with their monetary support. My 50 cent challenge turned into \$4.50 per picture and we ended up raising over \$2000.

"Normally ovarian cancer doesn't just does go away – it reoccurs and there is no protocol for reoccurrence – only first line treatment and that doesn't work for everyone," Julie explains. "Our mission is to help women increase their chances of survival by raising money to fund programs for better treatment options,

## Know the Symptoms

- ✓ Abdominal bloating
- ✓ Feeling full quickly while eating
- ✓ Pelvic or abdominal pain or pressure
- ✓ Urinary urgency or frequency
- ✓ Change in bowel habits
- ✓ Abnormal vaginal bleeding or discharge
- ✓ Back pain

effective early screening, symptomatic and genetic pre-disposition awareness and a cure."

Creating awareness is as simple as providing posters that detail ovarian cancer symptoms for doctors' offices. "A pap smear does not detect ovarian cancer," Julie cautions.

In February, the Be the Difference Foundation will hold its first *Wheel to Survive Ride* but with a twist. "For our supporters who do not live in Dallas, they can be part of a virtual team and ride at the same time as everyone here but wherever they live in the world," Julie says.

And one event at a time, Julie and her friends will *be* the difference. "There is a huge community of women with ovarian cancer," she says. "We are helpful to each other in a positive manner – we don't bring each other down we bring each other up."

