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Breast cancer survivor will walk to help other victims

By Steven Mihailovich | TODAY'S LOCAL NEWS

VISTA — Alicia Enriquez will always remember the moment in 2006 when she learned she had breast cancer.

"When I was told that I had cancer, I had the emptiest feeling inside," the Vista resident said. "You feel like you're in a dark room with no doors. Everything is silent. All you hear is yourself crying."

Enriquez is grateful for the help she received from the Vista Community Clinic and the Avon Foundation. To express her gratitude, she will be participating in the 40-mile Avon Walk for Breast Cancer in Long Beach next weekend.

"When I walked into the clinic, I was treated like I had the best insurance in the world, even though I had none," Enriquez said. "They guided me and saved my life. This is my way to give back."

Enriquez said she's been training for the past 10 months for the walk, working



Alicia Enriquez

Walk A4 >

Walk

>From A1

out three days weekly on average by using the treadmill at home and walking with her husband, Robert, in Carlsbad, where she works as a customer service representative for Farmers Insurance on Roosevelt Street.

That's no easy feat for the 41-year-old mother of two. The stomach tissue that was intended to be surgically extracted for reconstruction of her breasts had to be removed because it had become seriously infected, leaving her with what she calls "a hole in my stomach."

In addition, Enriquez said her spine has started developing arthritis.

But none of that has stopped her. She is so determined that she postponed her sixth surgery in two years to Nov. 14 to do the walk.

"I asked God to help me," Enriquez said. "Carry me if you have to, but please be with me. I just want to do this walk because I'm alive. That's my selfishness. That's my goal."

Enriquez said the walk would be painless compared with her battle against cancer. She first detected cysts in her breasts in 2004, but she didn't get checked immediately because of uninformed reassurances from others.

In the meantime, Enriquez lost her former job, leaving her without health insurance. It took her almost two years to get a mammogram and diagnosis, and treatment became a nightmare until she visited the Vista Community Clinic.

"People are dying because they're in line waiting for mammograms and chemotherapy," Enriquez said. "Can you imagine if these foundations didn't exist? People aren't educated on this. I wasn't."

Since landing her current job, Enriquez has become a champion for regular check-ups at her office. Co-worker Darlene Marvin said Enriquez gave her movie passes when she finally heeded her advice and got a mammogram.

"She is absolutely the most inspirational person I've ever met," Marvin said. "She's using her illness as a positive, instead of a negative. She says, 'What can I do to help other people?' instead of, 'Let me tell you my horrid story.'"

She is \$400 short of the \$1,800 in donations she needs for the walk, but Enriquez said she won't give up because she doesn't want sufferers and survivors of breast cancer to be left behind.

"I can see the fear in other people's eyes," Enriquez said. "It's that question mark when there are no answers. I know that feeling. That's the fear. It's very scary. You never get over it. It's been 2½ years and five surgeries and I'm still not over it. By doing this, it's my face walking for others."

To donate to Enriquez's walk, visit avon.foundation.org and click on "Make a Donation" or call her at (760) 730-1938.

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