

# At Glen Cove Hospital, these 'angels' help breast cancer patients



Doreen Mather, a breast cancer survivor and nurse, started a program at Glen Cove Hospital called Blue Angels that guides patients through the process of breast cancer surgery. Credit: Danielle Silverman

**By Joseph Ostapiuk**[joseph.ostapiuk@newsday.com](mailto:joseph.ostapiuk@newsday.com)@OstapiukJ Updated October 30, 2023 7:10 am  
SHARE

When Doreen Mather received her Stage 3 breast cancer diagnosis as a young mom of four children in 2015, her outlook was grim.

Mather, 49, a Blue Point resident, worked at Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center in Manhattan earlier in her career before becoming an assistant director of nursing at Glen Cove Hospital and, eventually, a surgical nurse navigator, guiding patients through surgery.

The registered nurse had seen people bear the blow of a cancer diagnosis. But suddenly, she became the patient.

“Here I am thinking, ‘Now I know what my patients actually go through,’ ” said Mather, who was given about five years to live. “Usually, I watch the movie, and now I’m in the movie. And it was a bad movie.”

After a long road of healing, she set up the foundation for the Blue Angels, a Glen Cove Hospital program that began in 2021 and has provided training for about 60 staff members and guided around 400 patients through each step of their breast cancer battles.

Alongside her colleague, fellow nurse Elizabeth Campbell, Mather and trained staff use therapeutic techniques like deep breathing exercises, aromatherapy and guided imagery to lower patient anxiety and stress levels.

Now, the Blue Angels are a fixture at Glen Cove Hospital, which has funded the program as a pivotal piece of its approach to helping patients.

The program name is an homage to Mather’s grandmother. Mather said her grandfather called his wife a “blue angel” because of the blue car she drove, and Mather always found the memory of her grandmother to be an empowering force through her breast cancer fight.

More inspiration for the program came from Mather's personal journey in which she found herself needing to take extra steps to overcome a helpless feeling after her cancer was treated.

She integrated a holistic approach to healing, along with traditional medicine, embracing meditation and other practices to target her psychological health – techniques the Blue Angels now share with patients.

Elizabeth Lubanski, who underwent a bilateral mastectomy in 2022 at Glen Cove Hospital after an annual mammogram revealed an invasive cancer, said the Blue Angels calling her before her surgery and speaking with her husband throughout the process was a source of immense comfort.

“It was someone that was connecting with you on a different level,” said Lubanski, 51, of Smithtown.

Glen Cove Hospital's breast surgery director, Dr. Susan Palleschi, performed Lubanski's multi-hour surgery. She said patients who are part of the Blue Angels program enter the operating room feeling calm and secure.

"This is an emotional and physical journey for women. It affects their identity, their femininity, their sense of self," said Dr. Neil Tanna, vice president of the hospital's Katz Women's Surgical Center. "And so, when you're taking care of patients, we realize that you have to be cognizant of not only how they're doing physically, but how they're doing emotionally."

Mather said she hopes to expand the program beyond Glen Cove Hospital.