

# Mapping Breast Cancer

By Rick Brand

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A grass-roots Suffolk movement to map breast cancer victims street-by-street will spread from West Islip to Huntington this spring in a quest to unlock the factors that lead to the deadly disease.

Officials of the Huntington Breast Cancer Action Coalition said yesterday that the group, with the help of Huntington Hospital, will mail surveys to an estimated 72,000 homes in the town within the next two months.

"We're trying to break new ground for the experts," said Mary Mohrman, outreach director of the Huntington organization. Advocates and local officials hope their surveys will provide a head start if pending federal bills to fund

## *Volunteers to track cases in house-by-house survey*

breast cancer studies on Long Island and other areas pass Congress.

Their effort follows an initiative that began last summer by the West Islip Breast Cancer Coalition for Long Island. Over the past six months, the 30-member group has garnered responses from about 6,000 of 8,700 homes in that community. Its survey has found 300 cases of malignant breast cancer and 1,000 of benign tumors — a frequency that county health officials say makes it a low-incidence area.

The West Islip activists yesterday said that they will knock on every remaining door over the next three months to get a complete picture of possible clusters and possible environmental factors that could cause the disease.

The widening of the survey efforts was announced in a Hauppauge news conference held by County Executive Robert Gaffney to announce a variety of initiatives to battle breast cancer.

Among the steps Suffolk officials disclosed is that the consulting firm Green-

man-Pederson Associates has volunteered to put information gathered by both groups into a computerized mapping system. The firm also will help with follow-up work, to see if environmental factors such as sewer lines, old dumps or other land uses might somehow be connected to areas with a high concentration of breast cancer. In addition, advocates said, they have gotten LILCO to agree to provide maps of the locations of power lines. The county and American Cancer Society also detailed plans for stepping up breast cancer screenings.

The battle plan comes after the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in January disclosed Suffolk's rate of breast cancer deaths — 43.6 per 1,000 —

Please see **CANCER** on Page 19

**BREAST CANCER**  
 Grass-Roots Study Expands  
 to Huntington Park

# Survey to Map Breast Cancer

CANCER from Page 7

is higher than the state or national average, and even the rate in Nassau, where the issue has been highly publicized. The Nassau mortality rate is 43.3, even though higher numbers of women in Nassau have breast cancer, while the state rate is 36.1 and the national rate is 27.4. Those statistics are from 1988, the latest year for which data is compiled.

West Islip women said they hope their survey will contribute to finding out what causes breast cancer, but say it has already had a dramatic impact by making people more aware of the disease.

"I've reviewed all the risk factors and I don't have any," said Lorraine Pace, who has undergone cancer treatment and who heads the West Islip group. "We know how you get AIDS, but we don't know what we did to get breast cancer and we have a right to know that." In addition to diet, risk factors include family history, early onset of menstruation and late childbearing.

Pace, whose 10-foot-wide, color-coded map was displayed behind officials, said since the survey started, 20 women who originally reported not having breast

cancer, have called back after a checkup to say they have the disease. Five of those calls came in the last week alone.

Since last summer, the West Islip group has done five separate mailings of a one-page questionnaire that asks women their age, address, family cancer history and whether they have contracted breast cancer.

However, experts warn that there are limits to the value of such surveys and that such a major expansion could pose massive logistics problems.

Roger Grimson, a biostatistician with the health sciences center at the State University at Stony Brook, said the "main value" of the West Islip survey is that "it is a picture of breast cancer in the community and what it looks like." He said he believes it is the first such community-wide analysis done anywhere.

However, he warned such an area-wide survey has only a "low percentage chance" of coming up with environmental factors that could be common to many of the cancer victims. Any federal study, he added, would likely start from scratch, doing an in-depth look at the histories and living conditions of individuals picked at random rather than looking at

a particular area.

Grimson also cautioned that expanding the survey to an area as large as Huntington would "be an enormous endeavor" that could end up with too few of the residents sampled to have much value. He suggested the Huntington group wait at least until the West Islip work is completed and assessed.

Despite those concerns, interest in doing breast cancer surveys is high. Eller Higgins, a Holtsville woman who has had breast cancer for several years, said she wants to survey her community as well.

"I've got a nine-year-old daughter and I don't want her to live with the same fear I've had to live with," she said.

During the press briefing, health officials also announced they will do screenings in the county's mobile van five days a week rather than four. And the American Cancer Society announced a week-long campaign May 3-9 to make low-cost mammograms for \$40 available to up to 1,200 women at 24 Long Island hospitals. The society also has enlisted 11,000 Girl Scouts to take what they termed "love notes" home to their mothers asking them to get screened.