



healing

JANET DENLINGER

Helping women who have undergone mastectomies

WRITTEN BY LINDA VOORHIS

GratITUDE. That was the feeling that propelled Janet Denlinger and longtime friend and business partner Morgan Hare to found the AiRS Foundation, which is dedicated to helping women who have undergone mastectomies.

“If you have everything you ever wanted in your life, you need to share that bounty of life with other people,” says Denlinger, who lives in Edgewater.

The organization educates women about reconstruction options and helps pay for breast reconstructive surgery for women in need after cancer or a preventative mastectomy.

“We are the only organization of its kind doing exactly what we’re doing,” Denlinger says.

“Others are funding cancer research, but we’re actually advising women and helping them with their surgery.”

Denlinger says she and Morgan wanted to find a way to give back after successful careers (Denlinger is a biochemist/physiologist, and she and Hare are co-owners of a skincare company, Hylaco LLC), so they asked a doctor friend about needs that were unaddressed.

“He said 70 percent of women don’t know about options for breast reconstruction, and even then, many cannot afford to have reconstruction,” Denlinger says. “Because, you know, maybe it’s more important to buy groceries for your kids.” But breast reconstruction can help women “feel whole again,” she says.



So with her friend of 45 years and Dr. Rod Rohrich of the University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center, Denlinger founded AiRS — the Alliance for Reconstructive Surgery.

“It seems to be growing and working, we feel very good about the work we do, and we seem to be having some success fundraising,” Denlinger says. “I think Morgan and I feel that we’ve had very lucky lives, and we’ve been

successful. Neither of us has had breast cancer. I’ve done pro bono nonprofit work since I’ve been semi-retired.”

Denlinger, who grew up in Florida, has lived in Bergen County since 1984. She and her late husband, Endre Balazs, founded the Matrix Biology Institute. “We chose to make science our life’s work and not have children,” she says, though she has stepchildren and grandchildren.

The AiRS Foundation gets referrals from around the county. “We want each woman who chooses reconstruction to be able to have it,” Denlinger says. To that end, the organization has advisers who have been through reconstruction and can offer help and advice to other women. AiRS also has surgeons who work at drastically reduced fees or for free.

“We hope to expand our reach as we keep going,” Denlinger says. “Like every other foundation, it’s never enough to help all the people we’d like to help. [But] we’re very happy with what we’re doing. It’s the best feeling in the world to me when you can make a difference in somebody’s life.” ■

AiRS FOUNDATION
MISSION:
 To provide women access to breast reconstruction surgery after mastectomy. The group advocates for, educates and supports survivors by raising awareness, building confidence, and restoring dignity through funding and the support of their professional network across the country.
airsfoundation.org



(Right) An AiRS Breast Reconstruction Awareness Day event in Dallas. (Left) Denlinger, Dr. Rod Rohrich and Morgan Hare, the three founders of AiRS, at one of their events.

COURTESY OF JANET DENLINGER