

## **Bringing Awareness to Breast Cancer**

**Nonprofit organization Girls Night Out Altoona Inc. supports and shares awareness on a problem that matters in the community.**

**By Abigail Rudy**

[Girls Night Out Altoona Inc.](#) (GNO) might sound like an adventurous night out, but it is a non[Girls Night Out Altoona](#)profit organization committed to educating its community about breast cancer, emphasizing the importance of early detection and ensuring access to proper treatment. GNO began as a small "pay it forward" project. Juls Bratton, the founder and president of GNO's Altoona branch, has a long history in fundraising. She recalls a former boss at American Red Cross who assigned her a fundraiser focused on breast cancer, and that's where it all began. After her boss unfortunately succumbed to breast cancer at the age of 39, Bratton decided to continue her legacy by raising breast cancer awareness. She explains that GNO educates women about breast cancer at all their events in Altoona, PA, ensuring people understand their mission and know that their funds support underserved communities.

GNO consistently advocates for regular mammograms and supports initiatives such as walk-in mammogram days at UPMC Altoona. Mammograms are important to get yearly because it is [the only test shown to reduce breast cancer deaths](#), according to the American College of Radiology. This improves odds of survival and can help avoid more extensive treatment. GNO also backs organizations like the Bob Perks Fund, the Joyce Murtha Breast Care Center and contributes to the Penn State Cancer Institute.

"Those who donate to us know every dollar is going directly to the facilities that we supported last year, [when] we gave away \$200,000," Bratton said.

Last year, GNO split up \$200,000 that was donated to them from about 573 supporters. It was split up between all four facilities: [UPMC Altoona](#) to cover walk-in days for mammograms and other breast cancer related costs, [the Joyce Murtha Breast Care Center](#) to cover patient care, [the Bob Perks fund](#) for patients that fall into that category of needing financial assistance to keep their household bills paid and [Penn State](#) Milton S. Hershey Medical Center to cover patient care. Each facility received \$50,000 last year from GNO.

The Bob Perks Fund works closely with GNO and is a non-profit organization that helps to ease the financial burden of cancer patients by assisting with basic living expenses so they may focus on treatment and recovery.

Mr. Bob Perks was a State College PA native, and a Penn State graduate. Mr. Perks was a founding member of Coaches vs Cancer, Penn State Chapter. Bob Perks found himself in a battle with cancer. During his treatments, Bob, and his wife Doreen, met other people who were also battling cancer, and were not only fighting their disease, but were also in a serious financial struggle at the same time. After Bob lost his battle against cancer, Doreen and Bob's friends and colleagues founded the Bob Perks Cancer Assistance Fund in his honor.

“The Bob Perks Fund supports anyone who has a currently receiving treatment for a cancer diagnosis and resides in one of the following six counties: Blair, Centre, Clearfield, Huntington, Mifflin and Juniata counties,” executive director of Bob Perks Fund Cindy Brown said. “It helps people with all different kinds of cancer, including those men and women who are affected by breast cancer. Our entire organization is dedicated to helping local cancer victims. We help out financially so that cancer victims can focus on getting better and battling the disease, instead of worrying about how to pay the bills.”

Applications for financial help are submitted by a member of the patient’s oncology team. Their trusted referral sources know the patients best. They refer to those who have a true need.

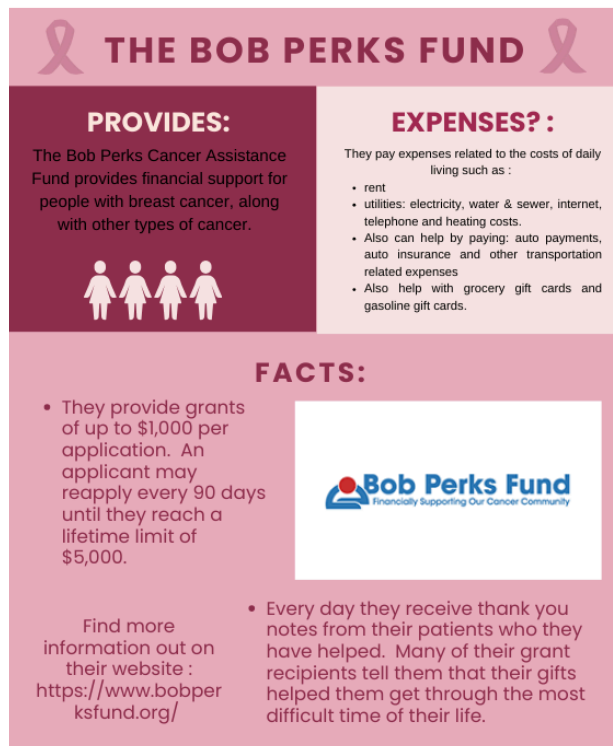
“We rely heavily on the judgment of those social workers, nurses, patient navigators and doctors who get to really know their patient’s needs. Although we would like to help everyone, the Bob Perks Fund fundraises every single dollar we give to our patients, so we want to make sure our gifts are given to those who are most in need of our help,” Brown said.

Bob Perks Fund is a lifeline when many need some help to get through the worst time of their life. They have helped many people avoid eviction or utility shut-offs, their grant funds can also provide gasoline so that the patients are able to get to their treatments.

“Many cancer patients are too sick to work and simply don’t have money for basic needs. We help families put food on their tables to feed their children or pay for special dietary needs of a cancer patient. All too often, cancer patients can not afford the gasoline to get to their treatments and simply don’t go to their appointments,” Brown said.

Everyone faces difficult challenges but Bob Perks Fund's most difficult challenge is to raise the funds to sustain our mission.

“We are very blessed to have a strong support network who recognize the importance of the service we provide. It truly takes a village to raise enough money to help our local cancer communities,” Brown said.



**THE BOB PERKS FUND**

**PROVIDES:**  
The Bob Perks Cancer Assistance Fund provides financial support for people with breast cancer, along with other types of cancer.

**EXPENSES? :**  
They pay expenses related to the costs of daily living such as :

- rent
- utilities: electricity, water & sewer, internet, telephone and heating costs.
- Also can help by paying: auto payments, auto insurance and other transportation related expenses
- Also help with grocery gift cards and gasoline gift cards.

**FACTS:**

- They provide grants of up to \$1,000 per application. An applicant may reapply every 90 days until they reach a lifetime limit of \$5,000.
- Every day they receive thank you notes from their patients who they have helped. Many of their grant recipients tell them that their gifts helped them get through the most difficult time of their life.

Find more information out on their website : <https://www.bobperksfund.org/>

**Bob Perks Fund**  
Financially Supporting Our Cancer Community

Many patients, who have been recipients of the Bob Perks Fund's gifts, appreciated their help so much that they became champions and gave back by holding fundraisers on their behalf.

"We are also supported by fabulous groups, such as Girls Night Out and some other wonderful partners we call our Strategic Partners. These supporters are paramount to the long-term sustainability of Bob Perks Fund," Brown said.

Never before in the Bob Perks Fund 18-year history have they given away that much money to this many people.

"We are incredibly grateful for Girls Night Altoona, Inc., UPMC Altoona, Cove Cause for Cancer, and all the other amazing Blair County supporters of the Bob Perks Fund. Without their help, we would not have been able to help 424 cancer patients last year with gifts of almost \$275,000. In Blair County alone, we gave away over \$54,000 in assistance to our cancer patients. Last year was a record year for us," Brown said.

This year is on track to surpass last year. By the end of 2024, they are expected to have supported approximately 500 cancer patients and their families, with well over \$300,000 in grants.

Bratton will be continuing to fundraise and help spread awareness on breast cancer to all.

"You're supposed to do what you can do, it all adds up. I always tell my girls on my committee that I just drive the bus, having the right people in the seats is what matters," Bratton said.

"Some people [members of GNO] came to one of our events and they're like, 'I have to get involved.' They wanted to be a part of it and I think people in general want to do something good but they just don't know how to get involved. But we have a lot of good community support, which means a lot," Bratton said.

There are 22 dedicated women on the volunteer-driven committee. But Erica Peterson is not on the committee but is still involved in many ways, who describes herself as a normal person who dedicates her time to help out the cause. Peterson has been involved with GNO for the past three and a half years as a supporter of the organization, attending the annual Girls Night Out events every October. Throughout that time, she has helped when she can to fundraise and collect donations while also promoting the organization through her family's personal breast cancer story on social media.

Peterson's mother was diagnosed with stage four breast cancer at the age of 52. She battled for six years before succumbing to the disease, passing away in August 2013 at the young age of 58. Peterson was very involved with another breast cancer initiative locally for many years and at the same time, she continued to appreciate GNO advocating for breast cancer awareness and research while supporting local patients and their families.

"I was always curious about the event. It was Juls Bratton, the founder and chairperson of GNO, that caught my eye. I was so inspired by her enthusiasm and commitment to the cause," Peterson said.

It ended up prompting her to reach out directly to Juls Bratton about attending her first GNO event in 2021. Since then, Peterson has hosted a table of her closest friends each year, using the event itself as a way to remember and honor her mom.

"Simply meeting Juls Bratton through GNO was a gift. Her passion and dedication to this cause is nothing short of inspiring and it helps to keep me focused on the promise I made to myself that I would continue supporting breast cancer initiatives in memory of my mom," Peterson said. "Attending the annual GNO events has also allowed me to meet many inspiring women who also support the cause. I consider it a blessing to be in the presence of women who have fought or continue to fight breast cancer."

GNO's priority looking ahead is fundraisers that they will be holding. They currently have 1,000 people coming to their event, held at the Blair County Convention Center, making it the largest fundraiser in the county. They have a waiting list of 22 additional tables. That's an extra 220 people that want to come to the event and show their support.

"This year, the only thing that's going to be in the interior is going to be tables, and all of our baskets are going to be throughout the lobbies. So we're trying to focus on getting more people into the actual program set, then putting them out. So, hopefully, we can get another maybe 10 to 15 tables in there. It might be a little tight, but we want everybody to come who wants to," Bratton said.

Today is a very different time from the past; mammograms were not talked about as much as they are now, and GNO is allowing people to learn more about mammograms and breast cancer.

"I think people are more at ease getting their mammograms because we talk about it now, but years ago, no one talked about it. No one got mammograms," Bratton said. So be proud of smashing your boobs and being in that obscene position for a while."

Real people everyday get a mammogram because it is needed in order to know if they are at risk. There are many local community members who speak at GNO events expressing how grateful they are because GNO saved their lives by giving them opportunities to learn about mammograms and important breast cancer information.

"We have some people that come to our event that say, 'you saved my life, because I haven't had a mammogram in five years, and I got one today for the first time since then.' And that is important because it shows how some people don't have the education level about breast cancer awareness and that is why it is so important to us that we are able to educate women

about breast cancer,” Bratton said. “We also have a survivor speaker every year. If someone 's been through breast cancer, we have them speak and tell their story because it's important.”

## GIRLS NIGHT OUT UPCOMING EVENTS

### HOLLAND BROTHERS MEAT RAFFLE:

\$1,000 IN GIFT CARDS,  
WINNERS WILL BE  
ANNOUNCED IN AUG.  
AND IT'S \$5 FOR EACH  
TICKET.

### HARVEST FEST (A BOOTH) :

Happening in Sept.

### MARIANNA'S HOAGIES SALE:

Happening in July

### MRS. GROVE:

Happening in June

### SOMETHING THEY WILL RAFFLED OFF:

ABOUT \$1,600 WORTH  
OF TEXAS ROADHOUSE  
GIFT CARDS

### SOMETHING THEY HAVE ALREADY RAFFLED OFF:

A scooter - donated by  
Roundhouse Harley  
Davidson

Find out more information on  
any events coming up on  
their Facebook page, their  
Facebook page is Girls Night  
Out Altoona Inc.



Members of GNO pose after an afternoon of raising money by hosting a cash bingo. Photo courtesy of GNO facebook page.