# A Horse Farmer's Cancer Diagnosis Spurs Community Action

Kami Rivera faced Stage III breast cancer treatment with confidence knowing her Maine stable was in good hands.

August 31, 2022 By Laura Schmidt

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Shortly after her honeymoon last fall, farmer Kami Rivera learned she had Stage III breast cancer. The 38-year-old owns Sunny Hill Stable with her husband, Luis Ruzzo Rivera, in Frankfort, Maine, and her diagnosis necessitated a double mastectomy, breast reconstructive surgery, aggressive chemotherapy and many radiation treatments. During this time, as the Bangor Daily News reported in an inspiring profile, Rivera received both emotional support from her husband, family and friends but also the support she needed to keep Sunny Hill Stables operating while she underwent treatment from members of her community.

"At first people come out of the woodwork to help," she told the newspaper. "Whenever people hear the word 'cancer' everybody is on board with helping."

Soon and without hesitation, helpers as young as 12 were feeding and grooming horses, cleaning stalls, moving hay bales, picking up manure in the pastures and more. (Check out the Bangor Daily News story for photos of the farm.)

When Rivera needed to spend five weeks in Portland for radiation treatment, coming home only on weekends, she knew her helpers could manage operations while she was away. "It allowed my stress level for the farm to not even exist and concentrate on healing."

The past year made Rivera even more appreciative of her farm and her loved ones who share in caring for it.

In a Facebook post from July, she updated her clients and community that she is no longer teaching lessons and taking out trail rides. "I have appreciated every single client! I have loved watching you all grow as riders and as people! Horses are great for the soul! I encourage you all to return to the saddle at some point!

"Cancer has changed my life," she continued. "There's no going back to the way life used to be. I wish you all the best and send so much love to all of you! Thank you all for the support in my

cancer journey (which is still not over, radiation is up next!).... Be ok with taking care of what is important to you!"

Rivera was diagnosed after noticing a lump on her breast during a self-exam. The cancer came as a shock to her, the newspaper reports, because her family had no history of breast cancer.

Recommendations for breast cancer screenings can seem conflicting. The National Comprehensive Cancer Network (NCCN) updated its guidelines earlier this month to recommend annual mammograms for all average-risk women over 40.

> The new NCCN Guidelines for Patients: Breast Cancer Screening and Diagnosis is now available! Access it today: https://t.co/K7S8JacrP3#bcsm #breastcancer #breastcancerscreening pic.twitter.com/5jlQx8bgDn
>
> — National Comprehensive Cancer Network (NCCN) (@NCCN) July 27, 2022

"Everyone with breasts carries some risk of breast cancer, so the key is to know your risk," said Therese Bevers, MD, professor of clinical cancer prevention at the University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center and chair of the NCCN Guidelines Panel for Breast Cancer Screening and Diagnosis, said in an NCCN press release. "Most women with average risk should get screened every year, beginning at age 40, but if there are additional risk factors present, a provider might recommend an earlier start."

To learn more about breast cancer, including risk factors, symptoms, diagnoses and treatments, visit the Cancer Health Basics on Breast Cancer. And for a collection of articles on the topic, click #Breast Cancer. You'll find headlines such as "R.I.P. Olivia Newton-John, Beloved Musical Icon Who Had Breast Cancer," "Some Women Were Denied Flat Chests After Mastectomies" and "Breast Cancer Cells Are More Likely to Spread During Sleep."

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