

# THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER NEWS

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## Daughter continues fight for cancer cure

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FOR THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER



TUSTIN – Pink balloons, pink lemonade, pink cookies, pink posters and the hard-to-miss pink RV parked outside marked the 20th anniversary of Virginia Rhodes' death from breast cancer.

Farmers & Merchants Bank hosted the event on Friday where people could register for the upcoming Susan G. Komen Race for the Cure, in honor of Rhodes. Her daughter, Marcia Evans, is the branch manager of the Farmers & Merchants Bank at the District at Tustin Legacy.

Evans' mother raised three children, two sons and a daughter, in Covina after her 40-year-old husband died in 1962 from a heart attack.

"When my dad passed away, she had very little life insurance, just enough to get by," said Evans, 56. "I remember her studying during the day and late into the night. She was determined to not let my grandparents take care of us because she knew she was going to do it."

Rhodes's parents had offered to build a house for the family on their property in Sierra Madre, but Rhodes refused and instead studied for the civil service exam. Rhodes passed the exam and took a job at the post office, where she worked for more than 30 years.

"She was one of the first women to work in the postal office in Covina and it was a tough time during the '60s for women. She was definitely ridiculed. The men at the office told her to work as a waitress and that she was doing a man's job," said Evans. "Years later those men came to her and apologized. She was highly respected."

Rhodes retired when she was 59 and was planning on traveling until a mammogram showed a tumor slightly smaller than the size of a golf ball, Evans said.

Rhodes had surgery, but during the chemotherapy treatment the cancer spread throughout her body. Rhodes had radiation treatment which made her bones brittle, causing her to break her leg.

For the last two weeks of Rhodes's life, she was cared for by Evans at the hospital.

"I spent the night at the hospital and went home early in the morning and came back. I just didn't want to miss a moment with her. We talked even though she was on morphine. I would lay on the bed and hold her. She was my best friend," said Evans.

After nearly three years fighting breast cancer, Rhodes passed away on Aug. 20, 1990.

"She was fun, funny, and outgoing," said Evans. "She had lots of friends and she was always helping somebody. She was an example. She always had a positive attitude and was always smiling. Growing up, I never heard her say anything negative about anybody."

In 2002, Evans was diagnosed with Hodgkin's lymphoma, a cancer of the immune system.

"When I was going through chemo treatment, I kept my mom's Bible next to my bed," said Evans. "I went through her Bible and I could see notes that she had taken when she was taking her treatments for cancer. Having her notes and different verses of the Bible she had underlined was almost like I had her to get me through."

Now a cancer survivor, Evans became the manager of Farmers & Merchants Tustin in 2006.

"She gave me the confidence that I have," said Evans. "I'm a very strong woman in business and a good mentor for my kids just like my mom was. I think I model myself, not even knowingly, by how my mom trained me and just from the way she was."

Evans participated in the Susan G. Komen Race for the Cure last year for the first time.

"I fought tears the whole way, the whole several miles that we walked, because you see the pictures of the family members that they've lost. You see herds of people walking together and realize that this is just a small token of who's been touched by breast cancer," said Evans.

Wayne Pinnell, a Komen volunteer and managing partner of Haskell & White, parked his pink RV outside the bank to represent The Komen Orange County Affiliate. Carla Cammack of Fountain Valley, a breast cancer survivor and Komen representative, told her story in fighting breast cancer.

This year, 30,000 to 35,000 people are expected to attend. Organizers aim to raise \$3 million this year. The majority of the funds will go to education, screening and treatment grants for women in Orange County and 25 percent will go to Komen National for research grants.

"My mom would have been thrilled and I know that she wanted so much for the cure," said Evans, "When she was diagnosed she said, 'Someday there's going to be a cure.'"

Farmers & Merchants Bank is donating \$125 to the Young Women's Christian Association for each person who opens a checking account until the day of the Susan G. Komen Race for the Cure. The association helps women who do not have insurance or whose insurance does not cover having a mammogram.