



Comedians show laughing matters in cancer fundraiser

By Rachael Devaney / Contributing Writer



Stand-up comedians are coming to the Cape to also stand up to find a cure for cancer.

As Tara Cannistraci steps into the Cape Cod comedy spotlight for the first time, she will stand up for laughs...

But, also, to help find a cure for cancer.

The comedian and founder of We Stand Comedy, a New York City-based comedy house, recently partnered with Susan Mendoza Friedman, founder of Dancing for a Cure Cape Cod, to produce **“Laughing for a Cure”** – an event Saturday night that will benefit the Friends of Dana-Farber of the Dana-Farber Cancer Institute.

The comedy show will feature headliner and HBO/Comedy Central star Leighann Lord, and will also include New York City stand-up comics Cannistraci, Kimberley Hellem and Regina DeCicco. Special guest will be local writer, actress and comedian Christine Ernst – who is also known as the “Fat Ass Cancer Bitch.”



While aspects of the show will revolve around the topic of cancer, Cannistraci calls the event a “variety show,” one that people from all walks of life can relate to.

“Christine will do a very funny five- to six-minute piece on what being a survivor means to her,” Cannistraci says. “Then our other comics will talk about things from the female perspective – marriage, the single life, kids – observational comedy scenarios that will make people laugh for a great cause.”

Mendoza Friedman is a dance teacher who can often be found at Cotuit Center for the Arts conducting tap dancing classes for children and adults. This new event has given her another platform to raise money for breast and ovarian cancer research, besides her anchor event “Dancing for a Cure.” And while she will leave the jokes to the experts, she says she can’t wait to see what each comic has in store.

“Cancer is obviously a serious topic,” Mendoza Friedman says. “But I also think we need some comic relief within these serious situations, which these comedians will definitely deliver.”

Few people know more about using comic relief to address cancer than Ernst. In fact, the performer, also the Cotuit center’s educational director, explains that she often shares the story of how she became known as the “Fat Ass Cancer Bitch” at comedy and theater venues across the region.

“Eleven years ago, my neighbor had a Great Dane that kept pooping in my yard and every time I found these landmines of poop, I delivered them back into her driveway,” Ernst says. “One day, I showed up with a shovel full of poop and she called me ‘a fat-ass cancer bitch.’”

While it “wasn’t funny at the time,” with Ernst only five years in remission back then, she says the squabble empowered her to change the conversation and the narrative that surrounded her cancer battle.

“At the time, I was trying not to think about cancer, but people were insisting on buying me pink ribbon (expletive) and would only identify me as a survivor and I was mad about it,” Ernst says. “So, when she called me a fat-ass cancer bitch, I was like holy (expletive), thank you – that’s exactly the brand I’ve been looking for.”

Since then, Ernst says she has gone on to write about cancer “in a different way.”

“There is so much pity involved with cancer and I don’t want to ever be labeled as a sad survivor,” Ernst says. “And that’s why I have

chosen to tell my cancer story to others the same way I needed to hear it.”

For Mendoza Friedman, it’s Ernst’s “magnetic and powerful spirit,” that can help “Laughing for a Cure” attendees understand “a bit more” about how cancer affects the Cape community as a whole. While she has never had cancer herself, like many others, Mendoza Friedman has been greatly impacted by the disease – especially when her college roommate and best friend, Karen Schek, died from ovarian cancer in 2006.

Although she’s proud that she has helped raise about \$375,000 for Dana-Farber since Schek died, Mendoza Friedman says the “cancer conversation” must continue.

“Whether it’s through comedy or it’s through dance, it’s extremely important that we keep talking about finding a cure,” she says. “And that’s why providing this kind of event platform fits right into our overall Dancing for a Cure mission.”