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Brice finds a new business to boost morale through cancer

BY WILLIAM MANSELL

Ten years ago while driving through downtown Chicago, Sandy Brice and her husband, Philippe, saw a restaurant that sparked their interest.

"There was a line outside the door, and I said to my husband, 'If we ever go into business that's what we should do,'" Sandy said.

It was an idea that kept running through their heads, she said, but her husband "always had a very good job and I was employed, so it was never really something we developed ... until I got sick."

On Feb. 29, 2008, the Brices were shocked to learn that Sandy had an aggressive form of breast cancer. "It was devastating. It was something you don't forget," Philippe said. "That date will be in my brain for the rest of my life."

Little could the family members have guessed though, that when they were going through such a trying experience, it would prove to be the perfect time to start their own business, the Golden Croissant.

Sandy and Philippe had bought a motor home and, with their children, set off on a two-year vacation. They began their trip on the East Coast of the U.S. and worked their way south, staying along the coast.

"My husband had been laid off, and he had worked really hard those last few years, and we hadn't seen him that much and we just wanted to take some family time," Sandy said.

They said the time off would be a great opportunity for the family to reconnect and see the country. Then, after a year of being on the road, the Brices had to return to Florida in February 2008



WILLIAM MANSELL

Sandy and Philippe Brice work in their new restaurant, Golden Croissant, in Westfield South Square Mall.

so the children could take their Florida Comprehensive Assessment Tests.

"Our children were enrolled in a virtual classroom," Sandy explained, "... and when we got back, I happened to find a lump in my right breast, and I called my doctor immediately."

She added, "From there it went from one doctor, to the surgeon, to the biopsy, to the MRI, to discussions with the plastic surgeon and to being operated on. I've always taken care of myself. Never smoked. Never drank. Never did drugs. I just always did what's right, living wise. Cancer just never came to my mind.

"Everything just went very quickly," she continued. "Never in my life would I have imaged a doctor sitting across from me telling me I have breast cancer. When someone tells you that, it just puts a whole new perspective on your life. What's important, what's not important. For my husband and I to do something

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together for our children was something that became important for us.”

“People say they have so many problems with the recession and the economy, but those don’t matter when you look at the possibility of losing your better half,” Philippe said. “Things like this put those problems into prospective.”

Sandy and Philippe had planned on taking the two years off for travel then coming back home to look for work, but Sandy thought no one would hire someone with breast cancer. The economy had also just collapsed, so the number of jobs Philippe and Sandy could apply for were limited.

Unable to travel and unable to find work, Sandy and Philippe had come to a fork in the road.

“So that’s when we asked, ‘You know, what are we going to do for work?’” Sandy said.

“Even though I was sick,” she said, “it was now or never to put something together and open our own business.”

Although she was not feeling her best, Sandy and Philippe decided to go ahead with that plan. They saw it as a way to escape from the struggles of the chemotherapy and an opportunity to focus their energy on something positive.

“While we were working on this idea [for the restaurant] she was going through the chemo and it had a huge impact on her morale; it took her mind off the problem at hand,” Philippe said. “... It really did the same for me. It allowed you to forget about what is happening right now and project yourself in six months or a year. It brings out the better of you to help you move on.”

“Having the business while going through chemo was a great help,” Sandy said. “When you go through something like this, I think the most important thing is to keep busy, not sit at home.”

She added, “When you sit at home, all you’re going to think about is what’s



WILLIAM MANSELL

The Brices equipped Golden Croissant with a special oven they ordered from Canada to give their French pastries an authentic quality.

wrong. Any type of activity that you can do is good for your body and mind.

“You lose your hair, you feel terrible and you don’t look your greatest, but people are very understanding.”

THE GOLDEN CROISSANT BECOMES A REALITY



The Golden Croissant is located in the center of the Westfield Sarasota Square Mall. As they serve their customers, it’s easy to see in their faces their happiness and pride. The happiness for Sandy comes from being healthy and without cancer for a year; the pride, from seeing an idea come to fruition.

“An interesting concept” is how Sandy describes the family business. She calls

it a mix between a restaurant and a bakery.

“We import all of our baked goods from France,” Sandy said. “We bake them in our oven, which is a special oven that we ordered from Quebec to bake French bread and pastries so it tastes like you bought it from Europe. We kind of cheat in a sense that we don’t make anything here, but everything is authentic.”

The Golden Croissant serves bread from France, Denmark and Belgium. The Brices also make a lot of sandwiches, pastries and quiche.

With the business having been open for six months, the family is eagerly anticipating the winter season’s getting under way.

“We’re really looking forward to the Northerners coming back,” Sandy said.

If you happen to stop by the Golden Croissant during the month of October, the Brice family is donating all tips to the American Cancer Society.

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