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Media Contacts

Gale Smith
Phone: 832.667.5843
Pager: 713.768.1745
gsmith@tmhs.org

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Breast cancer advocate Roberta Schwartz named among Yoplait's 2008 Champions

Houston - 3/18/2008 -

When Roberta Schwartz was facing breast cancer and the battle of her young life, she found nowhere to go for information and no support from others going through the same struggle. So she set out to change all that.

Schwartz was just 27 when a physician told her she had an aggressive form of breast cancer. No one knew how to handle a young woman given this devastating news. She underwent a yearlong course of treatment, beginning with a mastectomy and ending with chemotherapy.

"I resolved myself to being more than just a patient," she says. "I could be an advocate."

So in 1998 she and two other women created the Young Survival Coalition, an organization dedicated to improving the quality and quantity of life for those under 40 with breast cancer. Since then, the organization has grown to more than 15,000 members and has had a significant impact on the lives of thousands of young women.



Roberta Schwartz, a senior vice president at The Methodist Hospital, has been named a [2008 Yoplait Champion](#) for her breast cancer advocacy. Ten years ago, Schwartz helped create a support group for young breast cancer patients that now has thousands of members.

Schwartz, now 37 and a senior vice president at The Methodist Hospital in Houston, has been named among the 2008 Yoplait Champions, men and women from across the country who are being honored for doing extraordinary things in their communities to help in the fight against breast cancer.

"I resolved myself to being more than just a patient," she

Twenty-five [2008 Champions](#) represent 17 states and comprise breast cancer patients, survivors and advocates as well as husbands, mothers, daughters and friends of those touched by breast cancer. Each champion has a unique tie to the disease, but all share a passion for raising awareness and

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"This is a great award and I am honored to accept it on behalf of the Young Survival Coalition," Schwartz says.

To commemorate this honor, Yoplait will donate \$1,000 to each Champion's charity of choice. Yoplait and its parent company General Mills have donated more than \$18 million to the breast cancer cause over the past nine years.

Schwartz's passion is clearly the organization she helped to create. "I'm amazed by the things the YSC has accomplished," she says. "There are way too many young women still feeling lonely and confused upon their diagnosis ... and to be able to connect these young women is something I was passionate about then, and will be continue to be passionate about for the rest of my life."

When it started the new group couldn't get a seat at the table with bigger organizations. Researchers shied away from studying young women because it was difficult to get the numbers required for a statistically significant study. Physicians were still telling young women that they are "too young for breast cancer."

But today, the Young Survival Coalition provides services to women in almost every state and in 11 foreign countries. More than 300 people access bulletin boards each day and nearly 1,000 attend an annual conference providing focused information on breast cancer in young women.

Embracing the motto, "Action, Advocacy, Awareness," members now attend conferences; lobby federal and state legislators; speak at universities, colleges, and health fairs; and run an annual awareness campaign targeted at the medical community, encouraging them to devote more resources to this underserved segment of the population.

In 2003, Schwartz received the coveted, national Susan G. Komen Jill Ireland Award for Voluntarism. And in 2007 Houston Hadassah named her a "Woman of Courage."

She also served as chair of the Komen New York City Race for the Cure® in 2001, helping raise more than \$1.7 million.

A decade ago, Schwartz chose between being

paralyzed by fear and taking action. She dedicated herself to the young women who would find themselves in the same situation she once faced. "Originally it was just a small, personal mission," she says. "The YSC has now become more than I ever anticipated ... it is much larger than the people who started it and will continue as long as it's needed.

"Those who live, and those who die, everyone has contributed to its mission and it will always be a part of who I am."

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