

Washington Commanders Annual Breast Cancer Awareness Month Activations



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Commanders' historic Breast Cancer Awareness Month

Rivera reflects on battle with cancer

Tanya Snyder reflects on "THINK PINK®" legacy

Breast Cancer Awareness Month gets Personal for many Commanders Players

By Hannah Lichtenstein and Zach Selby

When the pink of October is splashed across end zones, social media posts and T-shirts, Terry McLaurin can't help but feel a tug. It's a little stronger this month compared to the other eleven. The pull this month asks him to sit with her memory -- Betty McLaurin's memory -- a little more.

"Breast cancer is very near to my heart. My grandmother on my dad's side passed away from breast cancer," the wide receiver said. "Every time this month comes about, it makes me really think about her even more and the current cancer survivors who are going through it, the ones that are battling it each and every day."

McLaurin is one of many players for the Washington Commanders personally affected by the ravages of a disease that affects 1 in 8 women in the United States. For these men, Breast Cancer

Awareness Month isn't just a cause they feel obligated to talk about because they're professional athletes in the spotlight; this month is personal. That connection has motivated them to use their powerful platforms to deliver important

information to breast cancer survivors and their loved ones.

If there's one piece of knowledge that all those touched by breast cancer wish they could send a million times marked with a high priority flag, it's the message about

the significance of early detection.

"Early detection can be life-saving," long snapper Camaron Cheeseman said. "If you don't find out about it before it gets too severe, it can be too hard to treat."

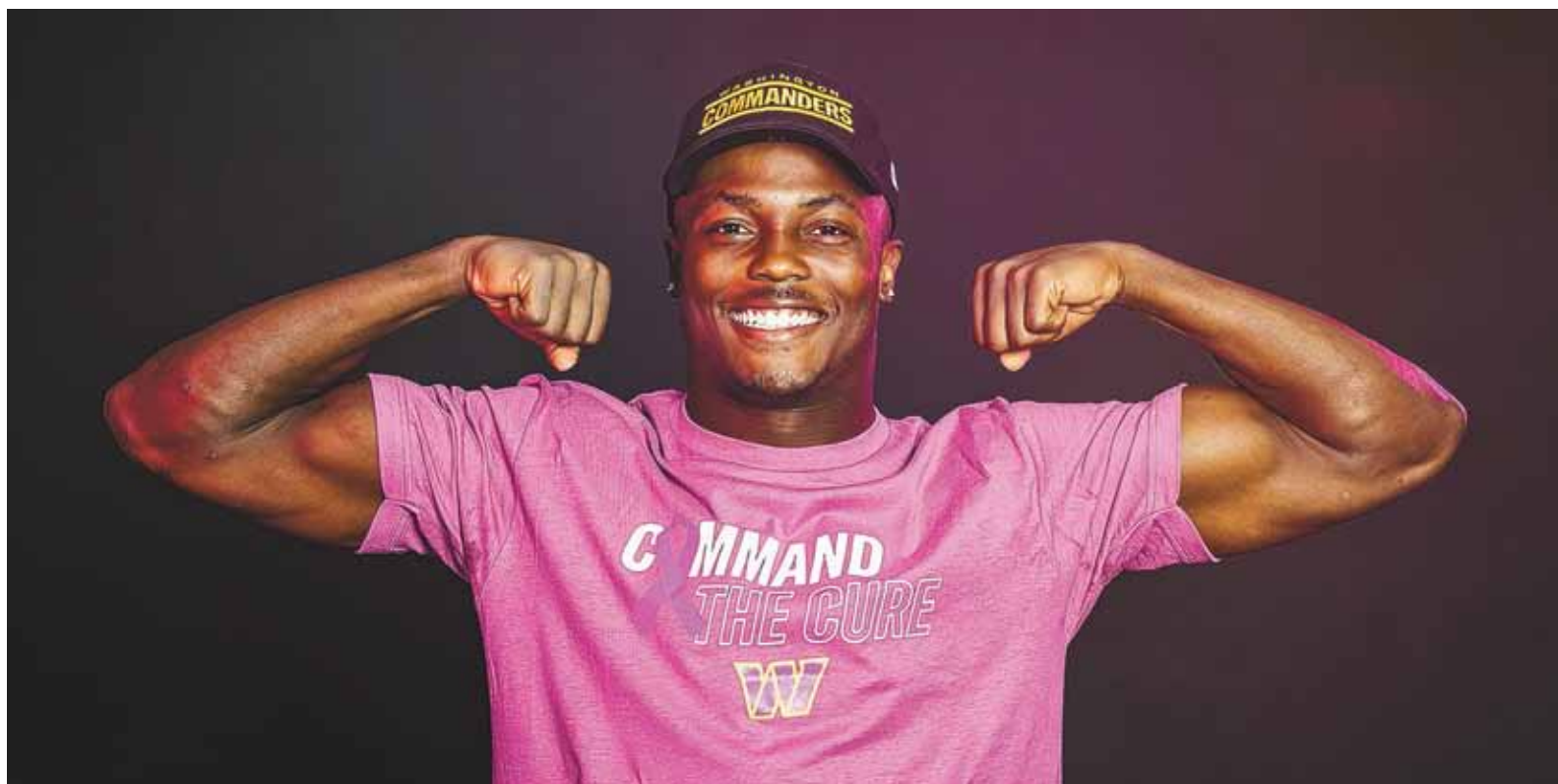
There's a reason Cheeseman scored in the 92nd percentile of the Dental Admissions Test -- he's a smart guy, and he's right about early detection. According to the American Cancer Society, when breast cancer is detected early, and remains in a localized stage, the 5-year relative survival rate is 99%.

Catching breast cancer early means getting screenings routinely. However, for millions, booking an appointment with a doctor and taking advantage of vital tools like mammograms may seem like a luxury reserved for the privileged.

"The best way to continue to bring awareness to breast cancer is obviously what we're doing [with the Commanders], but also making it available for all women to get routine check-ups no matter their status, no matter their economic background, their race, their

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BCA

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anything," McLaurin said.

McLaurin was in elementary school when he learned that his grandmother had been diagnosed with breast cancer. Many of his memories of her come from spring breaks, when he and his sister would make the trip to North Carolina to see her.

"It was a different kind of different kind of love, different kind of nurturing," McLaurin said. "I remember just waking up every morning and breakfast would always be like being cooked." "It's unfortunate now because I feel like I'd appreciate that even more."

McLaurin's grandmother has since passed away, but he believes that she would be proud of the man he grew up to be.

"A man of faith, a man of hard work," McLaurin said. "A lot of things that my dad instilled into me was probably from her. And just to see that I'm grow up as a man and handling my business, I think she'd be really proud of that."

Cam Sims found out about his grandmother's diagnosis going into his senior year of high school. No one in Sims' family knew, but she had been going through treatment for the past two years. After initially beating the disease, the cancer returned, and she passed

away shortly after.

The news hit Sims hard, and it still affects him to this day.

"She had eight kids, kind of raised them on her own," Sims said. "So, that's the tough person. Like the toughest woman I knew."

Though early detection awareness and medical resource access are potent weapons, they cannot prevent breast cancer. Until we find a cure, this cancer will indelibly impact lives. Many will see it as perhaps the toughest experience they have ever faced. When that happens, Logan Thomas, whose grandmother, Shirley Thomas, is a breast cancer survivor, preaches the necessity of steady support.

"My support for my grandmother just came from constant communication -- letting her know that I was always on her side, that I was there for her," the Washington tight end said. "I knew there was going to be tough days, but I knew how strong she was, and I was just trying to be strong with her."

It's a strength that can be hard to muster at times, but when it flows with its full fierceness, it is indescribably profound.

"The courage and the fight that you're displaying right now, you can't put into words what it means to your family, your supporters and your loved ones," McLaurin said.





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First-of-its-Kind Panel, THINK PINK® Game Highlight Commanders' Historic Breast Cancer Awareness Month Kickoff

By Hannah Lichtenstein

Breast Cancer Awareness Month has long stood as a significant and emotional time for the Washington franchise. Co-Owner and Co-CEO Tanya Snyder, a survivor herself, was a catalyst in turning BCA initiatives within the Burgundy & Gold family, like THINK PINK®, into leaguewide actions.

Every October, the franchise puts a distinct care and focus into spreading awareness about the importance of early detection, paying tribute to those affected by the disease and more. And while this October is rooted in those same values, it is different and historic as the first BCA Month under the Washington Commanders brand identity, which is guided by the tagline and rallying cry “Command

the Cure.”

“One in 8 women will hear the words ‘you have cancer,’” Snyder said. “Until we have a cure, we know that our best defense is early detection. That is why we are so passionate about this cause. Everyone knows someone who has been affected by this disease. It is critical that we spread the message about the importance of regular checkups and screenings because early detection saves lives. We are so grateful to have this platform and partnership with the League to amplify this message.”

For the first time, on Friday, Oct. 7, the Washington Commanders Charitable Foundation hosted a BCA panel at the National Museum of African American History and Culture. After being treated to music and a cocktail hour, guests listened to a panel featuring Mrs. Snyder, FOX5 DC’s

Ayesha Khan, GWU Medical Center’s Dr. Rachel Brem, President & CEO of Black Women’s Health Imperative Linda Goler Blount and Inova Health cancer genetic counselor Elizabeth Stark.

The conversation was filled with expert insights and personal stories, and topics addressed included issues surrounding health equity, progress towards a breast cancer cure, harmful myths and more.

“I learned so much information from this panel...I love that someone like Mrs. Snyder, who is well known and is also a survivor, shared her story and encouraged women to advocate for their health,” Ayesha Khan said. “I really enjoyed talking to people in the audience after...[they] were coming up to us to thank us for having this very important conversation.”

That theme of community

connection around this crucial cause continued into Sunday as the Commanders hosted their THINK PINK® game against the Tennessee Titans. The color pink popped everywhere around FedExField as employees, fans, coaches, and players all paid tribute to the day’s theme. Several chapters of Zeta Tau Alpha that has established a nationally recognized reputation for its commitment to breast cancer awareness philanthropy and education, came together to distribute 30,000 pink ribbons as a gesture of service and solidarity.

“It meant the world to me to be able to be there for a cause so close to my heart with my closest friends,” said Huy To, a senior ZTA at Old Dominion. “Being able to see the survivors smile and enjoy life gives hope to millions of women.”

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PANEL

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Among those who Huy and her ZTA sisters interacted with on Sunday were the 500 All-Star Survivors. Invited as guests of the team, the group sat throughout the lower bowl, and 30 of them were hosted at a pre-game tailgate and in a suite.

In one of the most exciting experiences of the BCA game, a group of the survivors and loved ones were brought down to the field for a dedicated halftime show. One by one, the women ran out of the stadium tunnel,

and were announced as though they were star players. They were given a moment to shine while the announcers gave some quick facts about their breast cancer story.

“I am still basking in the glow of running out on the field to be recognized when the announcer called my name and having the world hear that I am a survivor and that I kicked cancer’s butt,” All-Star Survivor Wanda Gardiner said. “After going through treatment and completing chemo I never rang the bell...this was my bell ringing ceremony.”

Afterwards, the survivors stood on the field with their

loved ones, and all came together to lift a pink ribbon that stretched from sideline to sideline.

“I found it very special that we were able to include a guest in the event. It meant the world that I could experience this with my husband, specifically holding the ribbon with him on the field and watching the pink fireworks together,” All-Star Survivor Liane Lewis said. “This was not just my battle, but his as well. I was honored to attend such an inclusive celebration of strength.”

The spirit from a memorable BCA kickoff weekend will carry into the rest of the month. On Monday, Oct. 17, the Commanders,

in collaboration with Breast Care for Washington, stationed a mammogram van outside of FedExField. As part of the team’s continued commitment to equity and service, the van offered free state-of-the-art 3D mammography to women in the DMV community, regardless of insurance status.

To put a ribbon on the end of the month, the Commanders, in partnership with the American Cancer Society, hosted the 14th annual All-Star Survivors Celebration at Firefly Cellar Vineyards where attendees were treated to lunch, makeup consultations, massages, facials, and more. See photos from the event on page 16.





Ron Rivera Reflects on Battle with Cancer and Being an Advocate for Proton Therapy

By Zach Selby

Ron Rivera thinks about that day every time it comes up on the calendar. Being told he had cancer is not something he can easily forget.

The first thing that comes to mind is anger. Prior to being diagnosed with squamous cell carcinoma, a form of skin cancer, he felt that he was in “the best shape I’ve been in.” He was told by his doctors that it was “very treatable and very curable,” but the fact remained that it was stunning news, and he was about to undergo the most difficult challenge of his life.

Over the following two months, Rivera went through 35 proton therapy sessions and three cycles of chemotherapy. Although he did not miss a game during the 2020 season, the treatments took their toll, and two years after ringing the bell to signify the end of his treatment, he is still feeling the effects.

Rivera remains cancer-free, and he has personal experience of how much it takes to reach that point. It is why he has become such a

strong advocate for providing healthcare to those who cannot afford it.

“We are supposedly in the most advanced country in the world, and yet we don’t have affordable and easily accessible healthcare,” Rivera said. “And it just blows my mind that that people with insurance can’t get the care that they need because there’s a cost associated to it.”

Rivera’s treatment, which spanned seven weeks, involved a proton therapy that involved a more targeted form of radiotherapy. There was a snag, though; he was initially denied the treatment by his insurance because it was deemed too experimental.

Rivera eventually got approved for the coverage thanks to his doctor vouching for the treatment, but it was still a jarring experience.

“It kind of put a lot of things into focus for me,” Rivera said. “You’re never really prepared to go through it. But when I was told you can’t have that treatment, I became even more determined that I was gonna get that treatment, and then when I got that treatment, we were gonna win.”

And Rivera did win, but it took weeks of long days and physically draining procedures to get there. Rivera is an even-keeled person and tried to keep routine as close to normalcy as possible, although there were times when the reality of his situation hit harder than others.

“When it really hit me mostly was moments of fatigue, just being completely worn out,” Rivera said. “There were times and we’d be in coaching staff meetings that I literally would fall asleep.”

The process of eating was also a difficult task. He would need to stay up long after he finished his food to make sure that everything travelled through his esophagus.

“Those moments of staying up and just hoping and that everything did go down the right way, that became very retrospective,” Rivera said. “I spent a lot of time with my wife and my daughter just talking about things in general. And it really was a great time for reflection.”

Rivera’s family was a constant foundation of support throughout his treatment. His youngest brother, John, would call him

before he received his treatments (Rivera’s appointments were around 7:30 a.m., meaning John, who lived in California, would call him at around 4:30 a.m.), and then he would get a text from his oldest brother once his treatments were finished.

That was not the only support he received, though. Rivera experienced an outpouring of letters and notes from people he signed autographs for and taken pictures with. He still has a box in his office of all the letters he got from fans and people he has met throughout his life.

In Week 4 during the team’s Crucial Catch game, the team surprised Rivera with a “Coach’s Corner,” which featured hundreds of cutouts from staff employees as well as players and coaches from around the league.

“You’re never really alone when you’re going through something like this,” Rivera said. “People are thinking about you. And that’s one of the neat things.”

Over the past two years since finishing his treatment and being

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RIVERA

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cancer-free, Rivera's focus has shifted towards fighting the disease in another way: being an advocate for those seeking to receive proton therapy.

In addition to choosing St. Jude Children's Research Hospital, the world's first proton therapy center specifically for children, for the NFL's "My Cause, My Cleats" campaign for the past two seasons, Rivera and his wife, Stephanie, donated \$100,000 to the hospital after their dog, Tahoe, ran a blazing 3.39 as part of NFL Network host Rich Eisen's "Run, Rich, Run" initiative. Co-owners and co-CEOs Dan and Tanya Snyder also matched the donation.

Rivera's players have also contributed to his advocacy. In honor of his one-year biopsy confirming that he was still cancer-free, the players surprised him with a "Rivera Strong" decal that worn on their helmets for the team's "Crucial Catch" game and a check to St. Jude Children's Research Hospital for \$25,500.

"As a coach, you always wonder if you get a chance to reach out to the players and touch them," said an emotional Rivera after watching a video announcing the decal in a team meeting. "This was awesome, man. Thank you."

And after signing his new extension, wide receiver Terry McLaurin donated \$17,000 to the hospital.

"Some really cool things have come about it because of the St. Jude's program that we've tried to highlight and bring a little bit of

attention to," Rivera said.

Rivera's advocacy goes even further than donations. He was asked by the National Association for Proton Therapy to speak with Dr. Danielle Carnival, who serves as the White House Cancer Moonshot Coordinator in the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy on why proton therapy should continue to be an affordable treatment option.

"There have been some moves politically that could've made it an expensive venture for people, and it shouldn't be," Rivera said.

Even more humbling was that Rivera's radiologist and oncologist wrote up his treatments as a case study and submitted them to his healthcare provider. The insurance company confirmed that Rivera's treatments would be the standard for people with head and neck cancers.

"Just to know that that's one of the benefits that came out of it, I think was really cool," Rivera said.

Rivera fought for his life two years ago and came out victorious. His experiences, along with his efforts to give back, have been an inspiration for many, and some people have even asked him to consider writing a book.

Rivera's priority is coaching football right now, but one day, we may get a more personal memoir of everything he went through.

"If we do, we'll probably take the portions of that and donate it," Rivera said. "I think it's an interesting proposition. So, we'll see."



Entitlement Game Gallery

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Mammogram Van at FedExField Centers Equity Issues around Breast Cancer Health Care

By Hannah Lichtenstein

A superhero-like presence made an appearance at FedExField on Monday, October 17th.

"You can't see it, but this van right here has a cape, because it saves lives," Vicky Russell-Walton said to the crowd at Legends Plaza.

The villain that van will help fight is not any bad actor from a Marvel movie, but rather the very real and prevalent threat of breast cancer. Run by Breast Care for Washington, the mammogram van was the main feature of the Commanders' inaugural breast cancer awareness health fair and is the only facility to offer state-of-the-art 3D mammography to



medically underserved populations east of the Anacostia River. As an important resource that can move to serve communities at no cost to patients, the mammogram van helps to address life-or-death

health equity issues.

Numerous studies have shown that breast cancer disproportionately impacts women of color. Dr. Regina Hampton, a breast cancer surgeon for the last 17 years who

spoke at the BCA health fair, has become intimately familiar with that fact and her concern led her to her life's work.

"Women of color tend to get breast cancer at younger ages so that presents a challenge to a lot of providers who are not aware of that," Hampton said. "Many times, these women are told 'Oh, you're too young, come back when you're 40,... that may be too late. When she does finally get evaluated, it's usually a more advanced stage cancer... So, it's really about trying to educate the community to be empowered to say, 'No I've got this problem. Please take a look.'"

As Prince George's County's leading breast surgeon and the founder of Breast Care for

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HEALTH

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Washington, Hampton has committed herself to making a difference and trying to change this troubling phenomenon. Breast Care of Washington's mammogram van has become an invaluable tool in that pursuit.

"The van is about being right in the community where the need is greatest," Hampton said. "We're really happy to partner with the Commanders to make this successful in the community."

Dorothy Duppins, a PG County resident for 25 years, was so excited to hear that the

mammogram van was coming to Landover. Duppins, who popped by FedExField on Monday to get her mammogram, feels encouraged by the impact an initiative like this can have.

"I think it's awesome, because it's about community outreach," Duppins said. "Even those who don't hear about it or didn't get an e-mail about it, the visual out here when you ride past and you see it, that'll spark people's curiosity and make them want to stop by and check it out and make sure that they're safe and healthy."

There is perhaps no bigger advocate for the mammogram van than Vicky Russell-Walton. The two-time breast cancer

survivor who also spoke at Monday's event has dreams of mammogram vans being as widespread as gas stations are around the country.

About 15 years ago, Russell-Walton was close to becoming a statistic. Despite having all the symptoms of breast cancer, she was misdiagnosed four times and found her pleas for further evaluation ignored by her doctor.

"Last time I spoke to my doctor when I was misdiagnosed, he told me that I was interrupting his golf game and to stop calling. 'You're fine,' he said. 'Stop calling me. There's no reason for you to call me.' And so I had to fight," Russell-Walton recalled. "Thank

God I listened to my body."

Now, she educates others about the importance of self-advocacy and is passionate about making breast cancer health care more equitable. When barriers to access are lowered or removed, she preaches, lives are saved.

"Women are afraid to go to the doctors often times or they don't have transportation, or they don't have childcare... you pull that baby [the van] up in front of the community and say, 'Hey, I don't care what kind of insurance you have. Come and get your girls checked out,' and they will come," Russell-Walton said.



Tanya Snyder Reflects on “THINK PINK®” Legacy

By Zach Selby

When Tanya Snyder and a small group of Zeta Tau Alpha (ZTA) volunteers handed out the first 8,000 “THINK PINK®” ribbons at a Washington home game in 1999, she had no idea it would be the start of a league-wide phenomenon.

Nearly 10 million ribbons later, “THINK PINK®” has become one of the organization’s flagship initiatives. While the Washington Commanders have a new brand identity, one aspect that remains unchanged is its steadfast dedication to battling a deadly disease that will affect 1 in 8 women over the course of their lifetime.

“We’ve heard so many stories over the years and we certainly know that we’re making a difference, so it just makes me very proud,” Tanya told Julie Donaldson.

Tanya was a young girl when she first heard about breast cancer. She remembers being “very, very shocked and scared,” and as someone who grew up with her mother and three sisters, the experience has had a lasting, memorable effect on her.

It was a cause that concerned Tanya, so she participated in charitable events she felt could make a difference throughout her life. Fast forward to when she and her husband, Dan Snyder, bought the team in 1999, the two saw an opportunity to establish their own charitable foundation. They wanted to make a positive impact in the community by providing support and services to those who need it most. That is when the “THINK PINK®” initiative was born in the NFL.

Ten years later, the team’s efforts became more personal for Tanya. She found a lump two months after a mammogram in December of 2008. She assumed it was nothing, but it continued to bother her, so she scheduled an appointment with her doctor one month later.

“Please just tell me directly,” she said after going through a



sonogram. “I want to know. I just want to make sure everything is okay.” That’s when the doctor told her she may have breast cancer.

“I didn’t even know what to say,” Tanya said. “I just expected to hear, ‘Everything is okay.’ I was always of the belief that I would never get cancer.”

Tanya then had a biopsy which confirmed she had ductal breast cancer. Fortunately, the cancer was still in Stage 1, and it was considered estrogen receptive, which was a positive indicator. She would still have to undergo treatment though, so she did her research and looked at her options. For Tanya, and so many others, early detection was

critical in her positive outcome.

“I collected some great information and had the safest option for me since [the cancer] was detected so early,” Tanya said. “I was able to take care of it within a year and didn’t have to have radiation or [chemotherapy].”

In the years since her diagnosis and recovery, Tanya has heard the personal stories from women who want her advice. She takes that very seriously, she said, and is happy to support them. She also has a message for them: get regular checkups because early detection is still the best defense against cancer.

“If you find something from one

October to the next, chances are you’re getting it really early,” she said. “When you get things early, you have a lot more choices and options for care to be able to take care of it.”

“THINK PINK®” has spread far and wide across the NFL since Tanya started the tradition with her ZTA sisters. The Commanders are partnered with the American Cancer Society, the Brem Foundation and the ZTA Foundation. Since 2009, the NFL has raised over \$24 million that goes directly to communities and has helped conduct more than 600,000 cancer screenings.

Washington’s players have also shown they are eager to get involved beyond just wearing pink. Many participate in the annual All-Stars Survivor Celebration, which was started by former tight end, Chris Cooley, partnering with the Washington Commanders Charitable Foundation.

This started out of a love for a mother—Chris’ mom. “They made it happen by pulling women together for a day, making them smile, and making what would normally be an emotional, tough experience a happy and memorable day,” Tanya said. “[It’s] a day these women will never forget and the players will never forget, either.”

“I’m so proud of our players,” she added. “They’ve done a wonderful job and changed so many women’s lives that are in the thick of treatment. It makes me very proud.”

In planning the Think Pink campaign for 2022, Tanya said, “I hope our efforts this year and every year serve as a reminder to Think Pink and Make a Crucial Catch as early detection saves lives. There is a wonderful ripple effect with the cards we provide each year—we never know who will read them and schedule a lifesaving exam.”

This October, as she has for the last 24, Tanya remains outspoken for grassroots health advocacy. A program that began with beautiful simplicity, handing out pink ribbons, has grown into a nationwide effort and touched the lives of millions.

THINK-PINK® Gallery



All-Star Survivors Celebration

Firefly
CELLARS

On Tuesday, Oct. 25, the Washington Commanders Charitable Foundation, in partnership with the American Cancer Society, hosted its 14th annual All-Star Survivors Celebration at Firefly Cellar Vineyards. In honor of their triumph over breast cancer, the 30 women in attendance were treated to lunch, gifts, visits by surprise guests, spa treatments and more.

