

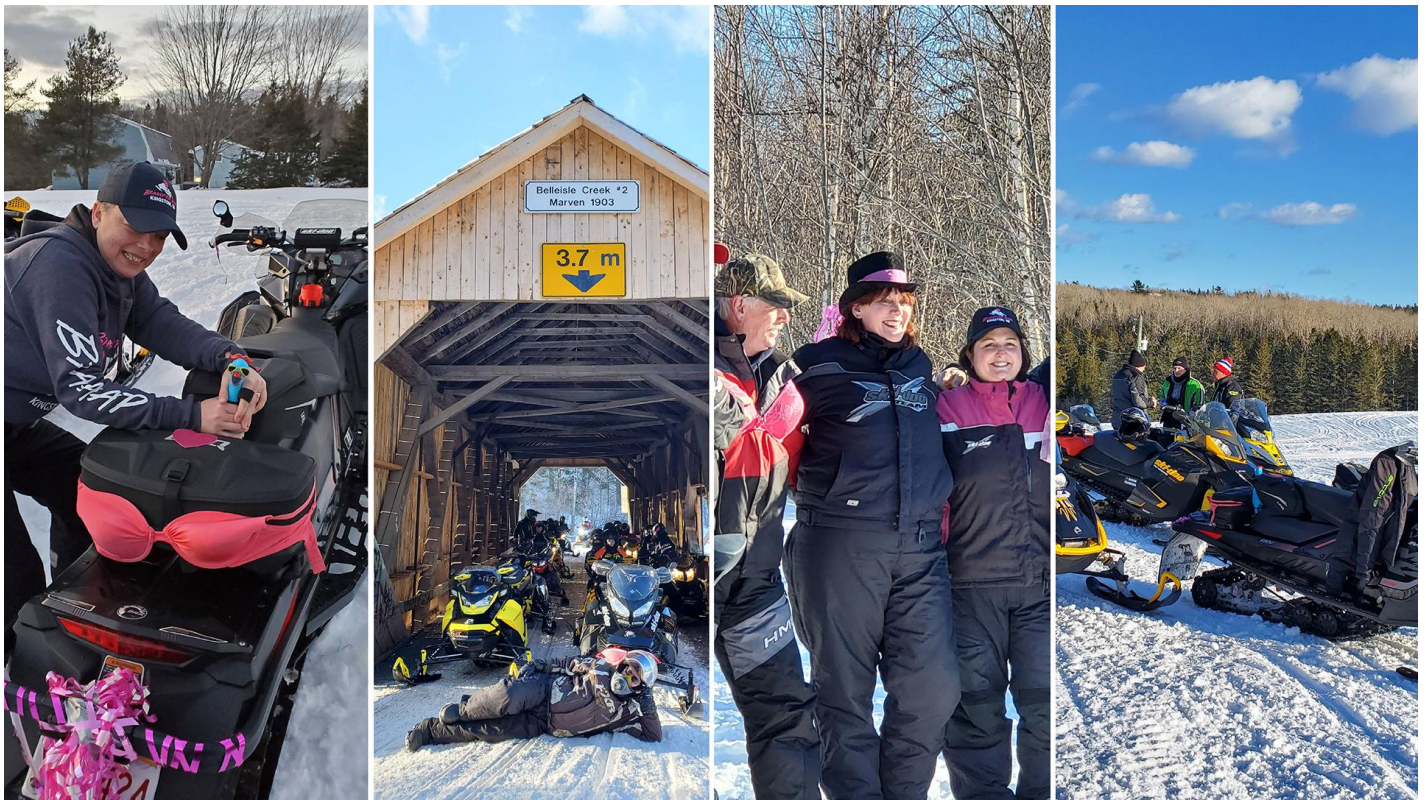
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Keeping Erin's memory alive

A local generosity movement snowballs, helping women with breast cancer.

Denise Miller is a get-'er-done kind of person. She's not fond of the spotlight, but she's determined to do all she can to support women with breast cancer.

After breast cancer took the life of Erin Appleby, a friend from high school, Ms. Miller felt driven to help others suffering with this devastating disease.



Since 2015, she and a dedicated band of volunteers have organized charity snowmobile rides, bottle drives, pub crawls, auctions and more – and have raised more than \$40,000 for the Erin Appleby Breast Health Fund at the Saint John Regional Hospital.

"We're keeping Erin's legacy alive," says Ms. Miller. "Erin is synonymous with helping women with breast cancer in this region, as far as I'm concerned."

The two women graduated together in the 1990s from Hampton High School, where Ms. Appleby was grad class president. Embarking on their new lives after high school, the two worked together at Air Canada for a time.

So, you can imagine Ms. Miller's reaction when she learned that her long-time friend – a young mother with another child on the way – was diagnosed with breast cancer.

In 2006, just 14 months after the diagnosis, Ms. Appleby lost her battle with cancer. She was 30.

From grief sprung a determination to not only remember a friend but to help others with breast cancer.

Together with about a dozen other women, Ms. Miller staged a snowmobile run to raise money in 2015.

Braaaap for Boobs was born. ("Braaaap" being the sound a snowmobile makes when the engine is revved – braaaap-braaaap-braaaap! is a rallying cry among sledders.)

That very first event brought in an eyebrow-raising \$1,400.

"I said, 'We're going to do this again next year.' And we did," Ms. Miller remembers. "We doubled the participants. Everyone really got into it."



Shalyn McRae, General Manager of Kredl's Corner Market in Hampton didn't hesitate to support the Braaaap for Boobs team.

You might say the community's generosity snowballed.

Each year, the Braaaap for Boobs movement grows as more people donate or take part and local businesses join in. The area pubs, for instance, are generous supporters. And it doesn't stop there.

People give not just for the annual snowmobile run every February but all year round. They save up their recyclables for bottle drives or slip Ms. Miller a donation toward the fund.

In 2022, horseback riders taking part in the Red Solo Ride for a Cure donated their proceeds. And then there is friend and former colleague Rob Etmanski, who contributes the proceeds from his sports jersey draws.

The Erin Appleby Breast Health Fund assists breast cancer patients receiving care through the Saint John Regional Hospital by providing funds for essential services.

Because of people like Ms. Miller and her fellow fundraising champions, more women in need of expensive prosthetics and prescriptions – even gas money for those who can't afford to travel for treatments – are getting the help they need.

"Can you imagine having to say no to a woman who just had breast cancer surgery, and who suddenly needs one of those expensive, specialized bras to help her heal?" Ms. Miller explains.

"I can't imagine having to say no to one of those women."

We're keeping Erin's legacy alive. Erin is synonymous with helping women with breast cancer in this region, as far as I'm concerned. - Denise Miller

Ms. Miller's passion for helping her fellow community members keeps gaining momentum, even in the face of challenges.

"Sometimes, the weather doesn't co-operate, but we don't let that stop us," Ms. Miller says.

"I remember one year we didn't have snow here in southern New Brunswick. So, a bunch of us from Kingston went to Juniper in upper New Brunswick. We rolled into town with 25 or so machines. The men were wearing pink. There were bras on snowmobiles. There were flamingos and feather boas. The locals didn't know what they were seeing."

Ms. Miller and crew, though, made sure the area snowmobile clubs knew ahead of time that the Braaaaap for Boobs entourage was coming. The local club members donated, adding more supporters to the growing movement.

What started out as a grassroots community fundraiser on the Kingston Peninsula has expanded to include neighbouring Hampton and other surrounding areas.

One life touches another life. An act of kindness by one person multiplies, sharing the gift of healing with many.

The power of philanthropy – the love of humankind – really does have the power to heal.

As the generous community support grows, the number of women the Erin Appleby Breast Health Fund helps grows too.



Shalyn McRae and her sister Taryn Giles, a cancer patient. Thanks to donor support, Taryn has benefitted from the Paxman scalp-cooling system that helps reduce hair loss associated with chemotherapy.

For Ms. Miller and the many supporters, hearing stories and updates about the real women their money is helping makes them feel even more invested as donors.

Taryn Giles is one of those women.

The outpouring of love she felt from her community after being diagnosed with stage-four breast cancer was a huge factor in her healing journey. She was treated with chemotherapy, then underwent surgery.

She was also able to benefit from the Paxman scalp-cooling system, brought to the Saint John Regional Hospital through donor generosity. The Paxman helps reduce hair loss associated with chemotherapy by constricting scalp blood vessels so that less chemotherapy drug will reach the hair cells.

“When the use of the cooling cap came up, it was a really big relief to me,” Ms. Giles says.

“The idea of being able to keep at least some of my hair and some of that normalcy that goes with having your own hair was a big deal. I’ve always had long curly hair and I know, for a lot of

people, that's how they describe me," she says. "The thought of losing your hair, on top of all the other stuff you're going through ... it's difficult to swallow."

She's grateful for the Erin Appleby Breast Health Fund.

To have some of those financial and emotional burdens lifted – to be supported and loved and cared for through the community – there aren't really words to describe the gratitude. - Taryn Giles, cancer patient

"Thank you never seems to be quite enough. Until you're in the situation, it's beyond description," she says.

"The generosity of people who give to this fund and make these kinds of resources available – it's a big thing and it helps people a great deal. Probably more than people will truly understand."

Her sister, Shalyn McRae, is the retail manager at Kredl's Corner Market in Hampton. Ms. McRae didn't hesitate to support the Braaaap for Boobs team when they came looking for prizes for one of their runs.

News of her sister's diagnosis rocked her world.

"We felt helpless, not knowing what to do or how we could help," Ms. McRae says.

"But I can tell you, first-hand, that programs like the Erin Appleby Breast Health Fund and other Saint John Regional Hospital cancer services mean the world to patients and their loved ones."

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