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MAMMOGRAMS SAVE LIVES *Former Olympian Medals in Bravery*

Swimmer and 1972 Olympic Gold Medalist Deena Schmidt knew something was wrong when she did a self-breast examination several years ago. When her doctor later confirmed her suspicion, she felt panic.

“Absolute fear,” Schmidt says was her initial reaction to learning she had breast cancer. “It’s like a horrible nightmare that hits you.”

Schmidt had the cancerous cells removed; however, the cancer was so aggressive an entire breast had to be removed. Despite her battle with cancer, Schmidt relied upon her family and friends for hope and support.

“They are my backbone. They are my reason for living,” added Schmidt who has been cancer-free for five years and now works for the Susan G. Komen Foundation.

Schmidt advocates for women to be vigilant in protecting their health.

Mammograms continue to be the best available method to detect breast cancer early. The American Cancer Society recommends women 40 and older get a mammogram every year.

October is Breast Cancer Awareness Month and County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency officials want women to be aware there are steps they can take to reduce the risk of getting breast cancer and surviving it.

“There are certain things women can do diminish their risk of getting breast cancer and increase their odds of survival,” said Wilma Wooten, M.D., M.P.H., County of San Diego Public Health Officer. “Knowing the most common risk factors for breast cancer and seeing a doctor for regular check-ups may help reduce a person’s chance of developing the disease or help detect it early when it’s most treatable.”

According to the American Cancer Society, breast cancer is the second leading cause of cancer death in women, after lung cancer. More than 190,000 new cases of invasive breast cancer are expected to be diagnosed in American women in 2009. About 1,900 new cases of breast cancer are expected in men. An estimated 40,000 breast cancer deaths are anticipated this year.

The most common risks for developing breast cancer include:

- **Gender** (About 100 times more common in women than men)
- **Age** (Especially high for women age 60 and older)
- **Personal History** (Women who had it may get it again)
- **Family History** (Higher risk for women whose mother, sister, daughter, or two or more close relatives have had the disease)

Poor diet, insufficient physical activity, alcohol use, and smoking are other risk factors.

For more information about breast cancers and mammograms, visit the American Cancer Society's web site at Uwww.cancer.org.

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