



# *The* *Baldwins* **Take On Breast Cancer**

By Patrick Dougherty

Through dynamic fundraising events that sizzle with celebrity star power, the Carol M. Baldwin Breast Cancer Research Fund has raised over \$3 million that's funded over 60 research grants. Here's the story of one breast cancer survivor, her supportive (and famous) family and their mission to find a cure.

*M*orning sunlight gleams off the polished chrome of nearly 3,000 motorcycles lined up on a beach road on the south shore of Long Island, New York. The riders start their engines with a deafening roar, and the cavalcade slowly sets off. Amongst the accelerating current of steel, leather and rubber, weatherbeaten Harley bikers ride alongside businessmen on shiny BMWs and movie stars in dungarees. The eclectic mix is united to rally for a singular cause: raising money for breast cancer research.

Carol Baldwin, perhaps best known as the mother of the world's most famous acting family, is the unlikely leader of this biker gang. Wearing a pink helmet, she cruises in a silver sidecar—drinking in the magnificent spectacle that is a result of her own triumph over breast cancer and subsequent life-changing mission to find a cure. The massive 50-mile motorcycle rally is part of The Carol M. Baldwin Breast Cancer Research Fund, Inc.'s weekend-long fundraising celebration, including a black tie/black leather celebrity gala, walkathon and entertainment festival—all the culmination of over a decade of charitable dedication.

After losing her husband to cancer and overcoming breast cancer, Carol vowed to make a difference, launching The Carol M. Baldwin Breast Cancer Research Fund, Inc., in 1996. "I never thought I was going to be a leader in the fight against breast cancer," explains



Carol. "I just made up my mind that I was going to do something to make it easier for others diagnosed with this disease... I just intended to help others who would go through this after me."

From this simple, sincere mission, Carol's fund has raised over \$3 million for breast cancer research; a staggering accomplishment for a relatively young charity. Of course, part of the fund's success can be attributed to the Baldwin family's star power. Carol Baldwin Fund events like the Weekend for a Cure, Celebrity Golf Tournament and other glamorous fashion shows, galas and mixers all sizzle with celebrity presence—but in a charity context, these events transmute America's oft-distracting fascination with celebrity into a powerful tool for supercharging fundraising efforts and making a tangible difference in the war against breast cancer.



"The Motorcycle Rides are my favorite. It feels great to sit in that sidecar; to think about how beautiful and peaceful the scenery is, how wonderful it is to see it... I appreciate the life I have."

"Celebrity lends some notoriety to the cause, and helps us draw a crowd... but most importantly, it helps us let people know about our mission," explains Fund Executive Director Katherine Fritz. "We're supporting both new and established researchers, investigating causes, prevention and treatment of breast cancer... we want to get information out to the community that they need to push for more research from legislators, get involved with advocacy and get involved with a charity like ours."

With headquarters on Long Island, the Fund is positioned on the frontline in the battle against breast cancer; this area is one of the nation's breast cancer "hotspots," locations that, for reasons yet unknown, have distressingly elevated breast cancer rates. Here *Energy Times* discusses these hotspots, the causes behind breast cancer and the

significant achievements of the The Carol M. Baldwin Breast Cancer Research Fund, Inc. with Chairwoman of the Board Carol Baldwin; Advisory Board member Alec Baldwin, star of NBC television's *30 Rock*; and Billy Baldwin, Vice President of the fund and actor who will be starring in the upcoming ABC drama *Dirty Sexy Money*.

***Energy Times:* How did the Carol M. Baldwin Breast Cancer Research Fund begin? What was your inspiration?**

**Carol Baldwin:** I was approached by a Long Island breast cancer advocate after being diagnosed with the disease about having the new Stony Brook University Hospital Breast Cancer Center named in my honor. I helped raise money for research at Stony Brook, and the Fund grew out of that effort. My inspiration came from my two daughters, and so many granddaughters... I thought, "This could happen to someone else in my family." I wanted to do something to change that. Only five years later my sister Patty would die from breast cancer. These days, I listen to my doctors; I take vitamins and try to eat healthy. I don't think about my cancer year-round—I do worry when I go for my yearly tests, but I can't dwell on it. I'm too busy to worry about what "might be."

***ET:* How has the Carol M. Baldwin Breast Cancer Research Fund changed your life?**

**Carol:** My life has changed completely. Who would have thought I'd be doing this? I was the mom with the cupcakes and the popcorn and the Kool-Aid in the backyard! Even after my husband died, I just never would have imagined this. But after my diagnosis, the issue of breast cancer filled my life completely. My days are filled with work for the Fund, raising money for more research, talking to newly diagnosed patients and their families. I talk to people all over the country; I go to the hospital and sit with the families while they wait through surgery. I talk because it helps to do this—you need to talk to someone who knows what you are going through.

***ET:* What are you most proud of in terms of what the fund has accomplished so far?**

**Carol:** The research that has been funded by our work. The more money we raise, the closer we are to finding the answers to curing breast cancer. I am also very proud to be a part of the amazing Breast Care Center at Stony Brook University Medical Center that is helping to diagnose breast cancers early.

**Alec Baldwin:** I say this affectionately, but in the beginning, you'd think that my mom and some of her cohorts were going to set up a card table and sell cupcakes by the sidewalk to raise money for the Fund. We didn't know how competitive the not-for-profit medical- and health-related fundraising dynamic is. When we first started I wasn't quite sure we were going to make it, because raising money is a tough thing to do. When my mother opened a chapter in upstate New York I wasn't sure how that was going to play out, either. But both chapters have



done quite well thanks to our dedicated supporters who really want to defeat breast cancer, because it is so prevalent and insidious in the lives of people everywhere. Breast cancer is not a disease limited to women in their 50s; it's women in their 30s, women in their 20s...even women in their late teens now are being diagnosed. It's mothers, wives, girlfriends, sisters, daughters...breast cancer is touching women in every band of society.

**Billy Baldwin:** I feel most proud when people stop me on the street and give me glowing reviews of the Carol M. Baldwin Breast Cancer Center at Stony Brook University Hospital on Long Island. You now see the emergence of hospitals that will specialize in certain areas. Basically the whole thrust is, the days of feeling like you have to go to Manhattan or other big cities to get the best care for anything are over. You can get quality care elsewhere, and I think people are overcoming that fear and insecurity. They know that when they are going to the Carol M. Baldwin Breast Cancer Center...the doctors, nurses, facility and emotional support are all fantastic. Patients just can't believe it. They'll tell me that they were going through a catastrophic life event, and if it wasn't for the Center's care, in terms of scientific, medical, expertise, bedside manner, easing the family's fears and holding the patient's hand through the entire crisis, they might not have made it through. That care is, short of a cure, another one of the things that we're hoping to accomplish.

**ET:** How important is the power of celebrity when it comes to fundraising efforts?

**Billy:** It's a double-edged sword; for the most part it is a good thing. Sometimes celebrity advocacy has a downside; when celebrities wield their status on behalf of a cause or an organization and they do so recklessly or irresponsibly. Of course, there are people who have the best intentions and are well-informed, and the media has decided they don't like that person...so they're ridiculed and criticized, but it's not justified. For the most part in terms of raising awareness and funds and educating the public, there's a huge potential upside—if the power of celebrity is taken seriously and utilized responsibly and effectively.

**ET:** Carol, can you discuss your involvement with the Onondaga Breast Cancer Mapping project?

**Carol:** It was the biggest mapping project at that time in the country, and I helped raise the money to make it happen. People were shocked that when it was done, the zip codes in the wealthiest areas had the highest rates of breast cancer. It was so surprising—it made us ask “why?”

**ET:** What's the answer? What do you believe is behind higher breast cancer incidence areas like Long Island, Marin County and the Great Lakes region?

**Alec:** We really don't have enough information to say; unfortunately the science is tough to prove. Here on Long Island, many people think it is aggressive turf management

policies. Long Island has a very thin lens [layer] of topsoil before you get down to porous sand and ground water. In areas where we see more elevated levels of breast cancer there has been over 100 years of aggressive pesticide, herbicide and fungicide application, typically from farming. It's not just agricultural on Long Island; you also have private homeowner application, golf course application and parks. Some people have ventured to say that golf course application is even worse than farming because they water the ground frequently; they have more aggressive irrigation...so the chemicals enter the water table before they become inert. On Long Island you have all of this, you have turf management for parks and recreation, you have a history of farming, you have porous, sandy soil underneath a thin lens of topsoil.

**ET:** You've also investigated radiation as a cancer cause, through your involvement with The Tooth Fairy Project [a national study of levels of radioactivity in American baby teeth].

**Alec:** Of course, I've been most concerned about the radiological component, because parts of Long Island are upwind from Oyster Creek and downwind from Millstone [two nuclear power plants] and their ambient fallout, depending on the time of year. If you believe, as I do...[that as] Rachel Carson said in *Silent Spring* that chemical contamination alone wouldn't be the culprit; the problem would be the chemical component combined with the radiological component. We believe that these systems are leaking radiation into the atmosphere and that there is no safe level of exposure. The Nuclear Regulatory Commission is always going to claim that whatever level is being leaked is safe but that's the job they feel they have to do. But we don't believe it's safe and we believe that the reactors—if not be shut down immediately, which is impractical in terms of energy policy—should not be re-commissioned or they should not be re-licensed. So here on Long Island you have these multiple factors, which may or may not be a part of it.

**Billy:** I agree that a combination of these factors could be contributing to elevated rates of breast cancer. I would imagine that when you examine the patterns of Japanese women, who have much lower rates of breast cancer, you'd find key differences. Do they experience a different environment and different types of stress? We know that Japanese women eat a lot of fish and healthy omega fats, along with a lot of vegetables. Perhaps they're consuming cleaner water. It's just interesting to me when you look at the breast cancer numbers...why is it one in nine nationally, one in six on Long Island...but much less in some other parts of the world?

**ET:** If poor environmental practices are partly culpable for escalated breast cancer rates, to what extent do you believe a green power and organic farming revolution would help reduce breast cancer?

**Alec:** I'm not a doctor and I'm not a scientist...I don't



know all the facts, but I do know some theories about cancer. Some modern theories suggest that cancer exists in everyone's body and the issue is whether it succeeds in invading the cell walls of whatever cells it's trying to attack. What compromises your cell structure can depend on genetics, behavior, emotions, environment and chemicals, food, cigarettes, booze, drugs... it can be a combination of all those things. There are people who smoke cigarettes and eat red meat and drink vodka every day and live to be a 100... they argue that the reason they survive is because they have less stress. Who knows? No one knows what the answer is. But if one component in your life is the tipping point—for example, if you eat red meat, don't get enough rest and don't have perfect genetics, and some environmental factor is going to take you over the edge and is responsible for you getting cancer... well, don't we believe as a society we owe it to ourselves to try to eliminate that element?

**ET: How important is the food element in breast cancer?**

**Alec:** The world now is divided into two groups: People who can buy organic food, people who can go in and buy free-range, organic, wild-raised fish, beef, chicken, vegetables; and then everybody else who buys food that is raised under more ordinary circumstances—which means that there's some chemical application in there, whether it's the grain the animals are eating, growth hormone the animals are being given or antibiotics the animals are being given to be treated for sickness. The food supply may be another culprit in this. That's a completely separate hour-long discussion right there, with someone who is more well-versed in it than me. But I am a firm believer that there are food-related issues with this as well.

**ET: What would you like to see the Carol Baldwin Fund achieve in the next ten years?**

**Alec:** I would say simply that we raise more money. I would like to see early detection, to see breast cancer rates drop precipitously. Now, if those environmental factors, whether they be chemical or radiological, dietary, aggressive turf management... again we don't know; we're only making intelligent guesses all of which are backed up by scientific research. I would like to see those factors reduced. I'd like to see Oyster Creek, Millstone and Indian Point closed. In terms of money, right now we've raised the amount of money that we have targeted and everybody is fairly happy... but I would like to see it grow. That's a tough thing to do; asking people to dig into their wallets and find some loose dollars here and there to give to organizations like this, it's very hard. We thought we'd get to a million dollars in grants a year pretty quickly and we have not. But that's a goal: that we give away a million a year.

**Billy:** It would be great to pop that celebratory cork; to find the cure for breast cancer. The next ten years will be exciting; we've been strategizing on how to make the organization different... not necessarily bigger, but more

effective and more efficient. We now have a decade of commitment to this cause behind us... the Fund has done great work, raising millions of dollars. We've given 64 or so grants and there are many, many more to come. We'd like to continue raising awareness and working to make breast cancer treatable. And we'd like to provide support and also to find a cure... to eradicate this horrible disease once and for all. We're just hoping that people recognize all of these efforts and reciprocate by giving back to the Fund. You know you could give money to another cause and I would encourage that, or you could give money to another breast cancer organization. Our fund focuses on what's going on around Long Island, what's causing this... why breast cancer is a catastrophic one in nine national event and an utterly unspeakable one in six on Long Island.

**ET: What words of hope would you give to someone who has been diagnosed with cancer?**

**Billy:** You know, I've had some friends who have had scares with cancer. My initial reaction is when confronted with those circumstances, whether it's a friend or family member, to keep a positive frame of mind and have a support system, whatever that is. It's easier said than done, but I have friends that have gotten a mammography and there was a lump on it—though they hadn't been biopsied yet, they go to "I'm gonna die." I've tried to support people and encourage them to not immediately go to that place. You have no news, good or bad. Even after getting biopsy results, I believe it's important to try and avoid doomsday scenarios at all costs... and I honestly think that it never ever hurts for somebody to strive for a deeper spiritual path in these circumstances.

**Carol:** When I was diagnosed and told that I needed a double mastectomy, it was so hard to accept. But I made up my mind that I wasn't going to sit around and say "Why me?" I just had to say, "This too will change. I will feel better, and I have to go on with my life." Work with your doctors. I know how hard the treatments are, I know the desire to just quit, but you have to get you through this. You have to make sure your body is okay and rid of the cancer. Believe you will recover, and when you do, you can make a difference. Get involved with a support group—you can help others going through this too. Talk to others, mentor someone, help them through their fight. Talking is so important. Your family can support you and try to do everything for you, but to be able to talk to someone who has gone through the same feelings and the same process is so important.



### Make a Difference

Donors and others interested in more information about the Carol M. Baldwin Breast Cancer Research Fund, Inc. can visit their website at [www.findacure.org](http://www.findacure.org), or call toll-free at 1-866-CURE-4-US.