

FortWayne.com

Posted on Wed, May. 03, 2006

Unsung Hero Her mission is cancer education

Evelyn Frierson is focused on helping others prevent and survive the disease.

By Kelly Royal
kroyalnews@aol.com



By Ellie Bogue of The News-Sentinel

Evelyn J. Frierson, director of Fort Wayne African American Cancer Alliance, helps Emma B. Moore, a resident at Phoenix Manor Adult Housing, fill out a questionnaire on cancer. As a cancer survivor, Frierson has insights into the disease that drive her to educate others.

When Evelyn Frierson first stepped into her position as director of Fort Wayne African American Cancer Alliance, she brought with her a background in minority health care, a desire to educate and a kind of firsthand experience that no one would want — cancer.

Frierson knows how easily cancer can become a part of life. She first experienced cancer in her own life when she lost her mother to the disease at age 13. Then it came again in April 2000 when she was given her own diagnosis of a rare form of colorectal cancer.

"I was a little bit floored by it, but I've always been a jovial person," Frierson said. "I just knew that I wasn't going to accept anything but a cure."

As a single mom, Frierson was further driven to remain positive. When she found gaps in information offered by doctors, she did her own research. She learned more about the disease and found out what support systems were available in the Fort Wayne area.

After undergoing a combination of radiation and chemotherapy treatments, Frierson made a full recovery and was given a clean bill of health in October 2000.

When the opportunity to work with Fort Wayne African American Cancer Alliance arose in 2001, it was a perfect fit for Frierson. She was anxious to help others find the resources and the know-ledge she had once sought about cancer prevention, screenings and treatment.

The alliance, 2135 S. Hanna St., is an affiliate organization of the National Black Leadership Initiative on Cancer (NBLIC). Under fiscal management by the nonprofit organization HealthVisions Midwest, FWAACA's mission is "to educate, advocate and collaborate to work towards the elimination of cancer in the African-American/Black community in our lifetime."

Frierson has served in many capacities for FWAACA: She worked as its first full-time coordinator, filled in as an unpaid volunteer when the funds were not available to pay her, and now serves as director. Her duties include coordinating and

attending public events, researching funding opportunities, maintaining the agency's Web site, managing the organization's budget and overseeing board development.

In January, Frierson worked in collaboration with the Allen County Health Disparity Coalition and helped set up a prevention clinic at Lafayette Medical Center, 2700 S. Lafayette St. Now held 5-7 p.m. the third Wednesday of every month, the clinic offers free and low-cost health screenings, blood pressure checks, and other information and services provided by many area health organizations.

"We're just really happy we're making some progress and helping our community to be healthier," she said.

"You have to pay attention to your body," she said. "It will tell you when something's not right. ... "Education is equally as important as the screenings for people to decide what they need."

FWAACA also utilizes several nationally developed programs initiated by NBLIC to educate communities on cancer prevention and early detection. One of the program areas Frierson has particularly enjoyed working on is Down Home Healthy Living (DHHL), which promotes strategies for prevention and early detection.

DHHL, with support from Parkview Regional Cancer Center, focuses on nutrition and physical fitness by means of an affordable do-it-yourself option — gardening. Frierson speaks about the program at lunch talks and provides information on the program at local health fairs.

Frierson also works with Visiting Nurse and Hospice Home. She is actively involved with the Indiana Cancer Consortium, which is based in Indianapolis, and she is a legislative ambassador for the American Cancer Society.

Learn more

For more information about Fort Wayne African American Cancer Alliance, call 745-1600 or visit www.fwaaca.org on the Web.