

CALLINGS

# A Survivor Creates a Cancer Support Center

Diagnosed with breast cancer, Susan Kapadia needed more support than her family—or her small community—could provide.

**“TO BE VERY HONEST,** I struggled for two years with cancer,” says Susan Kapadia. “I was very depressed. I owned a restaurant here in Ojai, California, and was diagnosed five months after I opened it. My oncologist recommended that I close the restaurant because 16-hour days were not working for me. So I sold the restaurant and spent a good portion of those two years in a pity party. One day, I went to my oncologist in Santa Barbara and told the nurse there, ‘I’m having a very difficult time entering the world again. I really don’t know how to remake myself. I’m lost.’ She grabbed my hand

and led me across the parking lot to the Breast Cancer Resource Center of Santa Barbara. As soon as I entered, they met me with hugs, and I knew I’d met my people.”

Susan became a volunteer at the Center, and the work filled her with joy—and fueled her desire to provide this kind of loving support in her hometown. She enrolled in a patient advocate training program at UCLA and, after receiving her certificate, began to pursue her dream of building a cancer care center in Ojai.

In the fall of 2012, Renee Mandala, a lactation specialist at a local childbirth resource center, was headed into surgery for ovarian cancer. She hadn’t yet met Susan, but when a friend presented her with a recorded collection of uplifting pre-surgery messages, she heard Susan’s angelic voice singing a Hebrew song of healing. “I soon started to access [Susan] as a sort of one-woman startup of a cancer support center,” Renee said. “I needed a lot of support. My family

was out of town, and I had a lot of worries, a lot of questions.”

In the months that followed, Susan formally launched “Ojai Cares” and Renee joined her as Assistant Director. Their mission is to “Provide a guiding hand and compassionate heart to people with cancer and their loved ones.”

Susan and her small staff now offer an array of integrative therapy programs such as oncological massage, Reiki, and reflexology, which are provided free-of-charge by volunteer practitioners to both cancer clients and their caretakers. They offer support groups like “Cancer as a Turning Point” (based on a book of the same title), visioning groups, and a drop-in chat group. The center also houses a lending library, and hosts community-wide educational talks and workshops that cover a broad range



« *The Places You'll Go*  
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## If you feel called to help...

Contact your State Cancer Registry to get an idea of the number of people dealing with cancer in your area.

Engage help from others who have a strong connection to the cancer cause—survivors and individuals with family members who know the difficulties of the cancer path.

Build a base of local integrative health specialists (massage therapists/counselors/yoga teachers) who are willing to volunteer hours.

Start a cancer support group and be patient.

Let any Primary Care docs/Oncology/Radiology know about support.


Engage volunteer legal/paralegal support and begin the process of starting a nonprofit.

Start small. A few dedicated people can get a lot done. Build slowly and carefully.

of cancer-relevant topics, from the physical to the spiritual. For example, an oncological nutritionist, Nasha Winters, recently gave a talk about the importance of following a diet and lifestyle program that counters the growth of cancer. (The details are in her book, *The Metabolic Approach to Cancer: Integrating Deep Nutrition, the Ketogenic Diet and Non-Toxic Bio-Individualized Therapies*.) These educational programs offer value to the community, and the community has responded in turn by supporting the center.

After several years of building Ojai Cares, Susan Kapadia is gearing up to help other communities learn how to create their own cancer care centers. Please feel free to contact her at [ojai-cares.org](mailto:ojai-cares.org). —PEGGY LA CERRA, PhD

For more on Ojai, California, see page 6 in *Journey to Renewal* (back of this issue).



# Seek Wisdom

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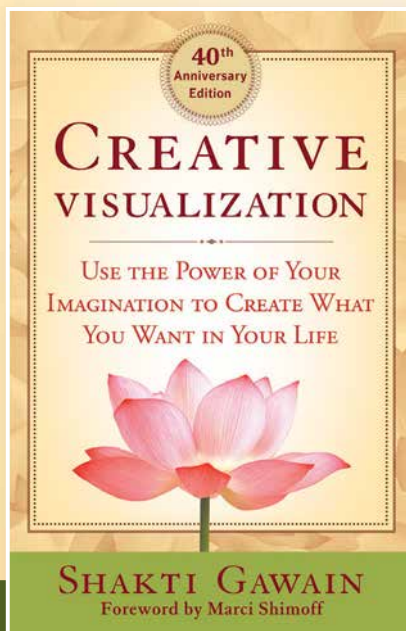
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