

## WOMEN IN BUSINESS

# Lisa Craven Rhoades: Taking charge, racing for a cure

By MICHELLE CAYEN RASH The Business Journal

**WINSTON-SALEM** — Lisa Craven Rhoades remembers clearly the moment when everything changed.

It was February 1998, five weeks earlier she had given birth to her first child, a girl. She had felt a lump in her breast and she, and her doctor, assumed it was just a clogged milk duct. Days later, she got a life-changing diagnosis — breast cancer.

That diagnosis helped her to realize nothing in life was certain and to take advantage of every opportunity. And while the stress of battling cancer combined with caring for a newborn may have overwhelmed many, Rhoades says it gave her strength.

"(My daughter) helped me not to focus on me because there was someone who needed me more," she says. "If it hadn't been for her, I probably would have had a pity party."

Instead, like so many other things in her life, Rhoades decided it was time to take charge. For example, instead of letting her hair fall out gradually as a side effect of the chemotherapy, she had a party to shave her head, toasting with champagne.

"I needed to be in control of the disease, and that was the way I did it," she says.

Rhoades also threw herself into her work in the marketing department at Sara Lee Branded Apparel (now Hanesbrands Inc.), devoting herself to her work with product development.

Then, in 2001, she found herself unexpectedly pregnant with a second child; the chemotherapy had put her body into premature



JULIE KNIGHT/THE BUSINESS JOURNAL

When diagnosed with cancer, Lisa Craven Rhoades poured herself into entrepreneurship and motherhood. She is today leading the Triad affiliate of the Susan G. Komen Race for the Cure.

menopause. Looking back, she realized that she was so busy fighting cancer that she didn't get to savor the experience of having a newborn the first time around. So she decided to leave Sara Lee, where she was then vice president of consumer marketing, to form her own business, thinking that would allow her to be home more and have more control over her own schedule.

She started Chrysalis Concepts, a product development firm, that year. And in 2004,

she joined forces with two other partners to form Bridge Marketing Professionals, a marketing staffing and consulting firm with about 25 professionals. The company works with major clients like Novant Health, Hanesbrands and Lowe's Home Improvement, but the core of its business is small to midsize firms that can't afford their own marketing departments or that need help with short-term projects.

While she loves her work, Rhoades' true

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passion is fighting for a cure for breast cancer. She became involved with the N.C. Triad Affiliate of Susan G. Komen Race for the Cure in 2000. She began taking on leadership roles in 2005 and took over as the group's president on April 1. The organization, which is in transition from being entirely volunteer-run to having a paid staff, awarded more than \$750,000 for breast cancer research last year.

Anna Eichorn, the executive director for the local Komen affiliate, says Rhoades' zeal for finding a cure and helping others in their fight is evident. She is also optimistic, Eichorn says, recognizing the strides being made in research and talking about how she would love to see a cure before her daughters have to think about breast cancer.

"You can see the difference between those doing it just to get their name out there and those working hard to make sure the work gets done," Eichorn says, saying Rhoades is clearly one of the latter. "She really believes in our mission. It is deep in the heart of her."

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