

HOPE IN BLOOM

Garden offers haven amid breast cancer

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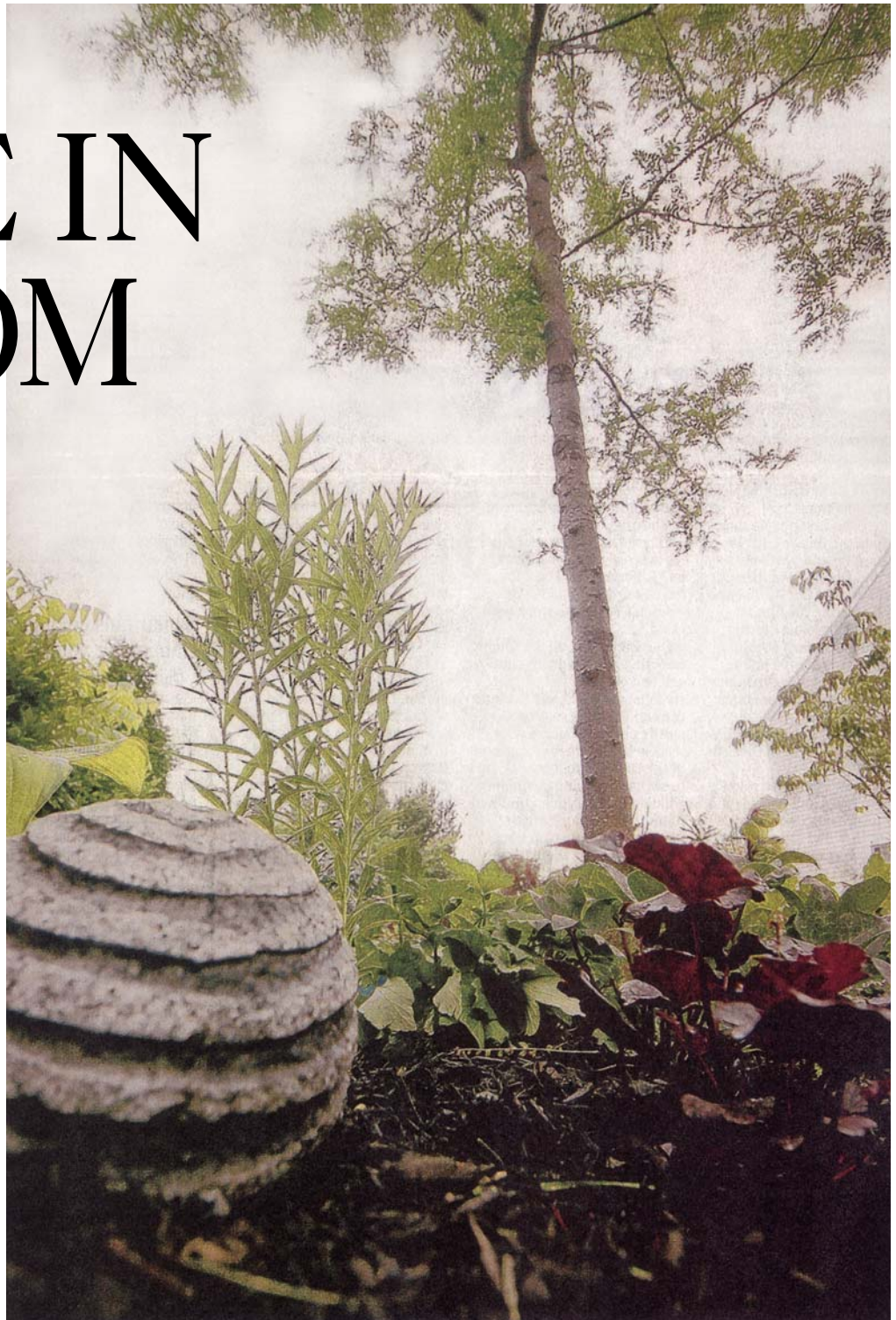
When Diane Hansen and her family look at the beach-themed garden recently planted in their Virginia Lane yard in Newburyport, they will remember the long fight it took to get it to bloom.

Hansen is the most recent recipient of a Hope in Bloom garden, donated by the organization that aims to brighten the lives of people touched by breast cancer.

Hansen, whose breast cancer is in remission, is looking at her recently planted garden as the start of something new.

"I think of this as the silver lining," she says. "When you have cancer, you listen to all the doctors and nurses and know what you're supposed to do, but in a way, you lose control of your life. This garden signifies...a rebirth, a fresh start."

Hansen, a substitute teacher in Newburyport who used to work for the town of Saugus, was diagnosed with an aggressive form of breast cancer in 2007. She says there were days she couldn't muster the energy to get out of bed, but she needed to keep things normal for her husband, Eric,



Breast cancer survivor Diane Hanson of Newburyport says her new Hope in Bloom garden in her backyard represents a fresh start.



Breast cancer survivor Diane Hansen, front center, flanked by her children, Anastasia and Daniel, along with her husband, Eric, back row left, pose with Hope in Bloom board members and volunteers who donated their time to build a sea-themed garden in the Hansen's backyard in Newburyport.

and two children, 11-year-old Daniel and 9-year-old Anastasia.

"I had to just get healthy," says Hansen, who stopped working after being laid off to focus on her health.

After undergoing treatment and a mastectomy in 2008, Hansen says she is now doing well and moving on.

"I don't like to think negatively," she says. "I think of it as a book and that chapter is closed. I deal with my health medically, and I know what

I've been through in just (the past) couple of years, but I'm looking ahead."

Founder Roberta Dehman Hershon says the Hope in Bloom gardens aim to provide a therapeutic sanctuary for patients like Hansen, offering them comfort and hope to meet both their and their families' emotional and psychological needs.

The Massachusetts-focused nonprofit organization donates all materials and labor for its gardens, which often cost thousands of dollars to create, Hershon says. The program plants indoor, outdoor and patio gardens, relying on contributions of time and funds to complete each one.

Hershon began the nonprofit two years ago after her best friend, Beverly Eisenberg, learned she had breast cancer. During her battle, Hershon made sure her friend always had fresh flowers in her home to keep her spirits up. When Eisenberg died in August 2005, Hershon wanted to continue to provide some hope and brightness to cancer patients.

Hope in Bloom accepts requests for gardens from breast cancer patients, and selections are made based on how needy and ill the patients are, although Hershon says the organization does its best to fulfill each request. Donations are critical to the program's success. Recently, students from Sharon High School sold greeting cards to raise \$1,500 for Hope in Bloom.

"We hope some kids up here decide to do a community service project like that, too," Hershon says.

Last Friday, women from the Garden Rodeo Writers Group, based in and around Framingham, whose members include writers, photographers and sculptors, spent the day planting Hansen's garden. Ornamental grass and shades of blues and greens now fill her yard, which includes a one-of-a-kind sculpture donated by artist Karin Stanley, who was one of the day's volunteers.

"I wanted to donate a sculpture for the garden," Stanley says. "It is a spiral sphere, which represents life, and I thought it was perfect for this garden."

Hansen is looking forward to enjoying her garden from her deck and cherishing the people who took the time to build it for her.

"It's humbling to think these people are professionals, donating their time," Hansen said, while volunteers worked to bring her garden to life. "It is just great. It makes me happy, and it's so simple."

For more on Hope in Bloom, visit www.hopeinbloom.org.