

## Debbie Mills Fights for Ovarian Cancer Awareness Year-Round

Igniting a wildfire of ovarian cancer awareness across the country has become the mission of Debbie Mills, who supports the legal and security teams of the Washington Division's Energy & Environment group located in Aiken, South Carolina. Debbie's only child, Gail, died at age 30 from ovarian cancer on Valentine's Day in 2007.



Debbie Mills, left, and her daughter, Gail, who died at age 30 of ovarian cancer.

"To make a difference we have to examine how we look at ourselves as it relates to cancer in general," Debbie said. "Although cancer treatments are successful in many cases, early detection is vital for survival."

September is Ovarian Cancer Awareness month, and Debbie hopes to get information about the illness to as many people as possible. Her efforts include organizing a relay team, Gail's Anatomy, to participate in the American Cancer Society's Relay for Life. Over the past three years, the Gail's Anatomy team has raised \$23,000—including \$3,207 raised this year alone—to benefit American Cancer Society initiatives.

Debbie began making a difference within months of her daughter's death, and is active outside of work daily promoting ovarian cancer awareness at every opportunity. "I started small, following in my daughter Gail's footsteps," she said. "Joining the American Cancer Society's Relay For Life was the first step."

"Fight Like a Girl!" is the team's 2009 theme for ovarian cancer awareness under the larger American Cancer Society's "A Cancer Free Paradise" umbrella campaign. "As part of the 'Fight Like A Girl' campaign, we produced T-shirts with the ovarian cancer teal ribbon and words," Debbie said. The shirt sales are a major fundraiser to support cancer awareness.



*Gail's Anatomy* team members at the 2009 Relay For Life. This year's theme was "A Cancer Free Paradise." URS employees are Bill Whiting, at left, second row; Debbie Mills, fifth from left, second row; Alicia Curry, in white hat, third row.

Symptoms of ovarian cancer are nonspecific and mimic those of many other more common conditions, including digestive and bladder disorders. A woman with ovarian cancer may be misdiagnosed with another condition, such as irritable bowel syndrome, stress and depression, before the cancer is detected.

The key to identifying ovarian cancer, Debbie said, is to be aware of persistent or worsening signs and symptoms. With most digestive disorders, symptoms tend to come and go, or they occur in certain situations or after eating certain foods. With ovarian cancer, there is typically little fluctuation—symptoms are constant and gradually worsen.

She encourages women to challenge doctors' assumptions if their instincts tell them there might be another problem.

This year, Debbie has also launched a Web site: [www.OvarianCancerAwareness4Life.org](http://www.OvarianCancerAwareness4Life.org). "After three years," Debbie said, "it's obvious that we are making a difference and saving lives."

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