

Susanne (left) wears a sparkling cardigan and matching shell from Alex Evenings. Pam's suit is from Kasper. Makeup artist: Christina L. Fulton.



Pam Bazella and  
Susanne Dombrowski

**Pam and Susanne have been best friends and business associates since they were students at Lebanon Valley College. Now, as their way to support the American Heart Association, they are the co-chairs of the Lancaster Chapter of Circle of Red.**

**For Pam Bazella**, heart disease is a personal matter. As a child, she suffered from rheumatic fever. The after-effects included a damaged heart valve. And, because the American Heart Association helped Pam's family purchase the medication she required at a greatly reduced cost, she views her support of the organization as "a way to give back." (Her volunteer efforts have included co-chairing last year's *Go Red Luncheon*.)

Susanne also became aware of heart disease at an early age. Her best friend's mother had valve problems. "She had several surgeries, but in those days, heart disease left you frail and disabled," she remarks. "For her, it meant that she couldn't lead a normal life."

Pam's own health issues, coupled with her knowledge of finances, made *Circle of Red* the perfect vehicle for giving back. "When I learned of it, I thought, 'This is where I should be putting my energy,'" she explains. And, she had a perfect co-chair in her long-time friend and business associate, Susanne, who says that she was motivated by statistics. "The fact that one in three women will be affected by heart disease is pretty profound," she states.

*Circle of Red* is a grassroots outgrowth of *Go Red For Women*. Its aim is to make women and heart disease a year-round discussion through special events that are held on a timely basis. (Outside of a slate of events that are held during February, plus the May luncheon, the *Go Red* movement tended to fade into the background the remainder of the year.) Membership, which requires a yearly monetary commitment, ensures that research funded by the American Heart Association not only continues, but increases.

Pam and Susanne have enjoyed helping to plan this year's events – the next will be a *Sweet Selections* party that will see participants select the dessert that will be served at the *Go Red Luncheon* on May 6. "We all wear red boas and have a good time," Pam says. "Currently, we have eight members, but our goal is 21 by May."

Pam, who graduated from Hempfield High School, and Susanne, who grew up in Berks County, became kindred spirits in Lebanon Valley. One day, Susanne noticed Pam was toting as many books as she was. "I thought, 'Here's a woman who's as crazy as I am,'" she explains. Susanne introduced herself and from that point on, the two became friends for life.

They portray themselves as working students who wanted careers and saw college degrees as their tickets to future success. "Both of us loaded up on credits," Pam says of their goal to earn double degrees in accounting and business administration. "Our Saturday schedules started at eight in the morning and went to six at night," Susanne adds.

Susanne graduated in three-and-a-half years, while Pam graduated in five (two of which were spent at Franklin

& Marshall). They agree that their areas of interest were "hugely male dominated" in the early '70s. Pam recalls that in a class of 200, perhaps 20 were women. "It's still male-dominated at the leadership level, but industry-wise, I'd say it's evenly divided," she remarks. While accountants are viewed as professionals whose work is driven by cold, hard numbers, Pam sees her profession as being "very personal – we're involved in people's lives and livelihoods."

After college, the two went their separate ways – Pam got married and had a son, while Susanne married and had three children – but always stayed in contact with each other. Pam, who had been working for a CPA firm, decided to go out on her own in 1987. "I no longer wanted an eight-to-five schedule," she says. "I wanted to build a practice around my son's schedule, so I began knocking on doors." She calls her mix of motherhood and accounting as "the best of both worlds."

By 1992, Pam had more business than she could handle, so she encouraged Susanne to sit for her CPA exam and join her firm. In 1997, they became partners in Bazella Dombrowski & Company. Two years ago, they merged with Brown, Schultz, Sheridan & Fritz, a Harrisburg firm that was looking to increase its presence in Lancaster. "All nine of our employees came with us," Susanne reports. "It's great to have access to more brains," Pam says.

Over the years, Pam and Susanne had expanded their horizons and were enjoying the time they devoted to their other business pursuits. Pam and her husband had become involved in the Quay Vodka company and, with their partners, have spent considerable time introducing the spirit to regional restaurateurs. They also are involved in real estate, notably the re-launch of the Northgate condominium project (with Marilyn Berger). Susanne is a co-owner of 1234 Microtechnologies, which provides IT support for small businesses in the area. "We couldn't do all we do without the support of our husbands," Susanne says.

Pam has always been aware that she would someday face surgery to repair her heart valve. Beginning in her late 30s, she

## *Tips for Better Heart Health*

1. Light a candle. Make a date. Let your birthday remind you to set up an appointment with your doctor to evaluate your risk factors. Get your blood pressure, cholesterol and glucose levels checked. Ask your doctor to help you reach or maintain a healthy weight.
2. Kick butts. If you smoke, quit. Here's a four-step way to snuff your habit. Day 1, cut the number of cigarettes you smoke by half. Day 3, cut the number of cigarettes you smoke in half again. Day 5, cut your smoking in half again. On your quit day – quit!
3. Get physical. Step, march or jog in place for at least 15 minutes a day while watching TV. Increase this exercise by five minutes each week until you're getting at least 30 minutes of this exercise most days of the week.
4. Don't let candy "bar" the way. If you eat at least 200-300 calories (about one candy bar) less and exercise at least 30 minutes on five or more days of the week, you'll get closer to your goal and you're more likely to keep the weight off. Avoid diets. They don't work in the long term.
5. Say, "Yeah for me!" Keep track of your successes in exercising, losing weight or quitting smoking. When you reach a goal, reward yourself by doing something you enjoy. Why? Because you deserve it. Sometimes, it's not easy to change.

begun experiencing premature ventricular contractions (PVC). Essentially, her heart wasn't "firing" properly – it's often referred to as skipping a beat, which results in heart palpitations and an inefficient circulation of blood. Beta blockers helped to remedy the situation.

Then, in April, 2010, her condition worsened. Pam, however, attributed a feeling of being "worn out more than usual" to the stresses of tax season. Later, she explained her ongoing symptoms to the flu. She ended up in atrial fibrillation and congestive heart failure and was a patient at Lancaster General for a week. "Everything was out of whack," she says.

Last August, she was in surgery to repair a valve. Despite successful surgery and taking a month off from work, she's still dealing with irregular heart beats and arrhythmia. "I know more than I want to know," she says of dealing with heart disease and learning the lingo that's associated with it. Still, she considers herself lucky. "What a difference a generation makes!" she exclaims. "Even as little as three years ago, I wouldn't have been able to have the minimally invasive, robotic surgery that I had."

Susanne, of course, was by Pam's side as she recovered from surgery. "Heart disease is scary and frightening," she comments. "And, it can be life-altering." Knowing that, both have vowed to make changes in their lives. In an effort to cut down on stress, Pam will be cutting back her schedule to 60 hours a week during tax season. (The average work week is 80 to 90 hours!) "I'm going to have to learn to work smarter, not harder," she notes. And, she will be following doctor's (and Susanne's) orders to take breaks during the day. She's also been given the option to work from home. Nevertheless, in anticipation of the most stressful time of the year – tax season – Pam received a survival kit from co-workers that was filled with all sorts of stress relievers. She's also monitoring her diet closely, placing limits on sodium and caffeine. "And, I want to exercise more," she says.

Susanne is also following the same dietary regimen, adding, "I should exercise more – it's on my list!" ❖

*For more information about Circle of Red, contact Pam at [pamelabazella@bssf.com](mailto:pamelabazella@bssf.com) or Susanne at [susannedombrowski@bssf.com](mailto:susannedombrowski@bssf.com).*