

AULTMAN

# BRAVE & Beautiful



Elizabeth  
AMIREH



Melanie  
BEGUE



Amanda  
OTT



Kathryn  
POWELL



# STARK COUNTY About

A GANNETT PUBLICATION

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**COVER & HERE: CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT:  
ELIZABETH AMIREH, MELANIE BEGUE, KATHRYN  
POWELL & AMANDA OTT.**

PHOTOS BY JULIE BOTOS

# AULTMAN HOSPITAL LOCAL LEADER IN BREAST CANCER CARE

**A**ultman Hospital is the local leader in cancer care. “Aultman is the leader when it comes to cancer care, and specifically breast cancer care. We see and treat the largest number of breast cancer patients here in our community and offer the most comprehensive care,” said Tina Biasella, MSN, RN, NE-BC, vice president of Cancer Services at Aultman Hospital. Last year alone, Aultman diagnosed and treated nearly 300 patients for breast cancer.

“The services we provide here are ones you typically don’t find at a community hospital and would have to travel to a larger institution for,” Biasella said. The hospital’s multidisciplinary team—made up of surgeons, medical and radiation oncologists, radiologists, pathologists, nurse navigators and clinical trials nurses—meets weekly to review cases to determine the best treatment for each individual based on all of the clinical information.

The best treatment is exactly what Aultman offers. Sabrina Shilad, M.D., Aultman’s director of the Breast Program, and other surgeons who are part of the Aultman team, provide breast cancer patients with the utmost care while using advanced techniques. They’re the ones you want taking care of you if you’re diagnosed with breast cancer. Aultman provides breast surgery services for breast cancer and benign breast conditions. The team of experienced cancer professionals guides breast cancer patients with compassion and knowledge.

Leading that team is Dr. Shilad, who has been on staff since 2010. She is the only fellowship-trained breast surgeon in the area, training at the Cleveland Clinic in the Breast Surgical Oncology Program

sponsored by the Society of Surgical Oncology. She is also board certified in general surgery and is a fellow of the American College of Surgeons.

“There was a big need in the community for a fellowship-trained breast surgeon,” Shilad said. “Women with breast cancer need specialized, focused care. Breast cancer is always changing, and you need to have someone who is really focusing on it so that the women—and even sometimes the men—get the best, most up-to-date treatment available.”

“Our mission is to provide the most up-to-date surgical procedures in a caring and supportive environment, treating everyone as we would want to be treated and emphasizing education and shared decision making,” said Shilad.

She is the only surgeon to offer oncoplastic reduction lumpectomies and nipple sparing mastectomy with hidden scars in the community, saving patients the inconvenience of having to travel far from home for these types of surgeries. In an oncoplastic lumpectomy, both plastic surgery and cancer surgery techniques are used together. Shilad rearranges and moves the breast tissue so that the breast has a better shape and contour instead of an asymmetric appearance. She also offers a procedure called axillary reverse mapping, which is a surgical technique that helps to lower the risk of lymphedema (swelling of the hand and arm), a potential lifelong side effect of breast cancer surgery.

Steven M. Kelly, M.D., FACS, serves as

medical director for general surgery and has more than two decades of experience in the field. He works closely with the multidisciplinary Breast Care Center team to offer incisional and excisional biopsies, duct excision, lumpectomy, simple mastectomy, modified radical

**“OUR MISSION IS TO PROVIDE THE MOST UP-TO-DATE SURGICAL PROCEDURES IN A CARING AND SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENT, TREATING EVERYONE AS WE WOULD WANT TO BE TREATED AND EMPHASIZING EDUCATION AND SHARED DECISION MAKING.”**

—SABRINA SHILAD, M.D.

mastectomy, sentinel lymph node biopsy, axillary dissection and more.

“My philosophy with patients is to treat each diagnosis as a unique event, then use our multidisciplinary resources to achieve the best outcome for the patient,” said Kelly. “Put the



SHRUTI TREHAN, M.D.

patient as the captain of the care team and do the best to support them along their journey. I'm grateful to be part of a patient-centric, outcomes-driven, multidisciplinary team that can offer our community the best in diagnostics, treatment, surveillance and support."

Joseph Saadey, M.D., is a general surgeon who serves as the cancer liaison physician for the Aultman Cancer Program. He has spent his entire career caring for breast cancer patients and has served at Aultman for 24 years.

"Receiving a breast cancer diagnosis is a scary time in a person's life," he said. "My office staff and I are determined to have our patients seen and treated quickly. We strive to provide a comfortable setting where my patients and I can have a very informative and down-to-earth discussion regarding surgical options. Together, we will decide on a customized treatment plan. I hope to instill confidence that they are receiving the highest-quality surgical care. Also, at Aultman Hospital, every patient

receives comprehensive care with multiple specialists working closely together. With this team approach, success rates are very high. I follow my patients for years to come to help assure their long-term success."

Stephen Lopez, M.D., plastic surgeon, has more than 12 years of experience treating breast cancer patients and performs all types of breast reconstruction surgeries, including implant-based reconstruction and a technique (known as DIEP) that uses the patient's own tissue.

"My main goal is to do whatever it takes to make the patient feel whole and complete," he said. "After the disparities breast cancer can cause a patient and their family, I want the patient to feel good about themselves, whether it is the way they look or a renewal of self-confidence to move forward in life."

The Breast Care Center at Aultman puts the patient's comfort first, offering a full range of screening and diagnostic services including 3D mammography, high-resolution ultrasound, stereotactic

breast biopsy (using an upright, 3D-guided system that improves patient comfort while yielding more accurate results), ultrasound core biopsy and breast MRI. The images obtained from the exams help to screen and diagnose diseases and cancers of the breast. All of these services are available under the guidance of radiologists, and Aultman is the only hospital in the area to have a staff of radiologists who all are fellowship-trained in breast imaging.

The Breast Care Center uses risk assessment tools on all patients who have mammograms, which allows staff members to ensure each patient's screening needs are met and help them make informed decisions about their care. A nurse coordinator who is certified in breast examination will work with patients to schedule any necessary biopsies following an abnormal mammogram. Having these many services, procedures and physicians available allows for exceptional care coordination and enables the Breast Care Center to tailor the experience to the patients' needs, keeping the focus squarely on the patient at all times.

Aultman's Breast Care Center is the first Stark County facility to have earned the "Center of Excellence" designation from the American College of Radiology and is fully accredited by the National Accreditation Program for Breast Centers. This means the center exceeds all standards of quality breast care.

"The breast center has a radiologist on-site, so I'm able to review the images with the radiologist for all of our cancer patients," Shilad said. "That allows our patients who have breast cancer to get a very thorough review of everything to make sure that nothing is missed. The radiologists are all fellowship-trained. They're wonderful, caring, compassionate physicians, and the team is wonderful."

Aultman also offers comprehensive medical oncology services, with oncologists Shruti Trehan, M.D., and Sunitha Vemulapalli, M.D., specializing in breast cancer care. Both Dr. Trehan and Dr. Vemulapalli have been caring for breast cancer patients for more than 20 years and are dedicated to providing the most comprehensive, up-to-date care for the patients they serve at Aultman. When caring for patients with breast cancer, Dr.

Trehan puts the patient at the center.

“We treat each patient’s personalized needs and strive to be there for them throughout their journey, not only as their physician, but also as their friend, mentor and guide,” Trehan said.

“We treat patients with both local and metastatic breast cancer with an emphasis on best clinical outcomes by incorporating the latest approved drugs,” said Vemulapalli. “Aultman’s participation in clinical trials provides optimal care for future breast cancer patients through testing novel agents, and our physicians work with a team of nurses, surgeons, radiation oncologists and navigators to provide complete and comprehensive breast cancer care.”

The Aultman Cancer Center is proud to be advancing cancer care through participation in national and investigator-led research projects. Along with standard treatment, Aultman also offers a host of

clinical trials for breast cancer overseen by Trehan, the medical director for oncology research. Trehan is also the principal investigator on a unique, investigator-initiated trial called the “B-TREUH” study, which is designed to evaluate the relationship between thyroid management and metastatic breast cancer.

“I would like to sincerely thank my lovely patients and their families for teaching me about hope and courage,” Trehan said. “Your resilience and grace inspire me to continue working together, researching together and healing together as we aim to cure breast cancer together.”

Additionally, state-of-the-art radiation oncology services are also available at Aultman. The Aultman Hospital Radiation Oncology department combines clinical expertise and advanced radiation therapy to deliver effective treatments for cancerous and benign tumors. Physicians, radiation therapists, dosimetrists, physicists and

nurses work together to provide patient-centered, compassionate care while using some of the safest and most efficient technology known today for treating cancer.

Douglas Keyser, M.D., medical director of Radiation Oncology, leads the radiation oncology team and has more than 24 years of expertise. Keyser strives to provide individualized, compassionate, state-of-the-art care for every patient.

“I love working in the hospital where I was born and in the community where I was raised,” said Keyser.

Another integral part of the team at Aultman for breast cancer patients is the nurse navigator. Individuals, families and caregivers who are experiencing cancer diagnoses have complex needs, and breast cancer navigator Erin Meek, BSN, RN, OCN, CN-BN, addresses these needs by supporting individuals through diagnosis and into treatment. The nurse navigator has specialized knowledge and training in cancer and works closely with a collaborative multidisciplinary team to promote an individualized, compassionate and efficient experience at Aultman Health Foundation.

#### **NURSE NAVIGATOR SERVICES INCLUDE:**

- Educating the patient/family on diagnosis and treatment.
- Informing the patient on what to expect prior to, during and after treatment.
- Identifying and addressing barriers to timely diagnosis and treatment.
- Assisting in making referrals and appointments.
- Identifying and facilitating resources to support the patient and family.
- Providing emotional support for patients and their loved ones.

Nobody wants to get a breast cancer diagnosis, but Aultman makes the whole process that much easier. Each patient’s care team is there every step of the way, providing support and compassion.

“Everyone here cares so much about all of our patients,” Shilad said. “Taking care of women with breast cancer requires a team, and I’m so fortunate to be a part of such an amazing team here at Aultman Hospital.”

—KELSEY DAVIS WITH HELP FROM  
AULTMAN HOSPITAL | PHOTOS  
PROVIDED BY AULTMAN HOSPITAL



**SUNITHA VEMULAPALLI, M.D.**

# BRAVE & Beautiful



Melanie  
BEGUE



Elizabeth  
AMIREH

*Kathryn*  
**POWELL**



*Amanda*  
**OTT**

**AT VARIOUS STAGES OF BATTLING BREAST CANCER, THESE FOUR WOMEN ARE UNITED BY A BRAVERY THAT ONLY THOSE WHO ARE FIGHTING FOR THEIR LIVES CAN UNDERSTAND. JOIN IN CELEBRATION OF THESE WOMEN, WHOSE BEAUTY SHINES AS BRIGHTLY AS THEIR ZEST FOR LIFE.**

PHOTOS BY JULIE BOTOS



When Elizabeth Amireh's son was away at college when she was diagnosed with breast cancer in the fall of 2014, she hesitated in telling him.

"I didn't want him to see everything I went through; I didn't want him to worry," she explained. "My mom did the same thing for me. She tried not to make her situation seem as bad as it was."

### LIFE

Because of her mother's battle with ovarian cancer, the disease was present in her life long before her diagnosis. Still, she developed an attitude of optimism when her mom survived for several years beyond her prognosis.

### DIAGNOSIS

Although Amireh got annual mammograms, she admits to being lax in routine self-examination. "I would tell everyone to do self-examination now."

Nevertheless, one day, she found a lump. Immediate diagnostic tests ordered by her doctor revealed her cancer.

"I was in shock. It was only two months after my mom passed. I had a very aggressive form of breast cancer. My oncologist recommended we start chemotherapy immediately."

### TREATMENT

Her oncologist, Dr. Shruti Trehan, was the same physician who treated her mother.

"She's amazing," said Amireh. "I can't say enough

wonderful things about her."

Chemotherapy treatments took their toll on her, mentally and physically. Treatment at Aultman Hospital continued after her double mastectomy and reconstructive surgery at Cleveland Clinic.

Through it all, she continued to work at Vita Boutique, the shop she owns in Hartville.

"It helped me. It gave me a reason to get out of the house," she explained.

### EXPERIENCE AT AULTMAN

Her faith guided her through the struggle. Family and friends helped her remain positive. But her sources of strength also included the staff at Aultman, she said.

"I felt fortunate to have such a good hospital so close to me. There was a familiarity that made me feel more comfortable," she said.

"It's really important to be able to trust your medical team. A lot of decisions have to be made, and having that confidence helped. Everybody at Aultman was wonderful. Compassionate. Very caring."

### CLOSING THOUGHTS

In the time that has passed since her battle with cancer, Amireh continues to support the hospital through projects of Aultman's Women's Board, such as the Angel Auction and other events that support the Compassionate Care Center, an in-patient hospice facility on the campus of Aultman Woodlawn.

She's "feeling fantastic" today, Amireh said, but she views life differently now.

"There's a big transformation," she said. "I don't sweat the small stuff. I try to slow the pace of my life down. I've learned to live in the moment. I've become more grateful, more compassionate and less stressed."

—GARY BROWN

# Elizabeth AMIREH

# Melanie BEGUE

**M**elanie Begue had a moment of self-revelation when she discovered a lump on her breast in August 2019.

“I have had a lot of things throughout my life that have been a little bit traumatic. I try and let things bounce off my back,” said Begue. “When I found the lump, I knew what it was. I knew it wasn’t an everyday cyst. I knew I had to stay mentally clear, otherwise I never would have been able to physically fight it.”

## LIFE

Begue is 45, single and the mother of two grown children. She left her nursing job at Stow-Glen Retirement Village in Stow in 2013 and went on disability. “I’m bipolar; that’s the whole reason I left.”

## DIAGNOSIS

“I had not been feeling good for months before I found the lump in August (2019),” Begue said. “I knew something was not right with my body. They always say if you have a lump and it doesn’t hurt, that’s probably cancer, and it was. I have a history of breast cancer in my family. My dad’s sister and my maternal grandmother both died of breast cancer.”

## TREATMENT

“It was amazing how they got me in so quickly. I went to chemotherapy from September (2019) to March, and ended up having surgery in April of this year. I had a lumpectomy and 21 radiation treatments.”

## EXPERIENCE AT AULTMAN

“You come in there and they all know your name. It’s nice to know they care about you and remember you; you’re not just a number. I had financial difficulties through all this, and Erin Meek, who is a breast care navigator, helped me out quite a bit, trying to find resources for me. She was very sweet.”

“I have a spot on my rib, but it’s small and they’re waiting until the end of (August) to redo the bone scan. The type of cancer I have, the triple-negative breast cancer, is one of the rarest and most aggressive.”

## CLOSING THOUGHT

“I know women are afraid of having those mammograms. They’re not fun, but they are necessary. Women need to trust their own instincts. We know our own selves the best. This can happen to you.”

—DAN KANE



**A**manda Ott, 44-year-old financial controller of operations at Timken-Steel, lived a lifestyle too healthy to allow a disease such as cancer to enter into it.

## LIFE

Even after signs of an abnormality showed up a few years ago and initial tests failed to confirm it, Ott's life went on, "in denial." Nervousness over her condition didn't set in until late last year.



## DIAGNOSIS

"I found out on December 30, 2019," Ott recalled.

She spent her first days after the diagnosis in shock.

"I was only 43 at the time of the diagnosis," she said. "Mortality kind of sneaks up on you, and you wonder for the first time if you are going to die. It's amazing how nothing else matters when you don't have your health."

## TREATMENT

Ott met with her surgeon, Dr. Joseph Saadey, on January 2, 2020.

"I had a whole new outlook. He spent over an hour explaining everything to me. I felt like I was the only patient he had that day. Walking out of there, I felt relieved to have a plan. I knew I would be okay."

Discussions with her medical oncologist, Dr. Shruti Trehan, and radiology oncologist, Dr. Susan Cheng, further eased her mind.

Her treatment included a lumpectomy in January and chemotherapy starting in February. Radiation treatments began in June.

"Chemo was a different experience because I cold-capped," she said, noting that this procedure allowed her to keep 85% of her hair. "It's a process of freezing your hair follicles during and immediately after your treatment to try and keep your hair."

It's not a matter of vanity, she stressed.

"Some women embrace losing their hair, and I think that is fantastic. But that wasn't me.

During a time when I felt so powerless, keeping my hair was something that I could control. It lifted my spirits tremendously."

## EXPERIENCE AT AULTMAN

The staff at Aultman also strived to create some sense of normalcy.

"Erin Meek, my nurse navigator, followed me through all of it, checking up on me through every part of the process," recalled Ott. "One of my radiation therapists, Jessie Rotondo, made me feel like family. You go almost every day for six or seven weeks. They know your name, and they do so much to help you, especially at the end when you're worn down."

Others close to her also came to her aid.

"My parents, my family, my friends and my co-workers were extremely supportive. My boss and my company have also been amazing and very supportive throughout the entire process," she said. "My friend, Jamie Hill, who was featured in *Brave & Beautiful* a few years ago, spent hours helping me understand the process. Everyone's experience is unique, but she really helped minimize my anxiety about what I was about to face."

## CLOSING THOUGHTS

What wasn't expected, she said, was the support from other survivors, who were strangers.

"People I didn't even know were reaching out," said Ott. "They understand what you are going through. It's the most amazing club that you hope you or your loved one never joins. I hope to someday pay that generosity and kindness forward."

In the meantime, with her treatments still fresh in her mind, Ott has resumed life with a fresh attitude.

"It's important to really LIVE life. Don't save that bottle of wine for a special occasion. Take that trip now, not when you retire. Knock some of those items off your bucket list. Spend quality time with family and friends, and be present. Tell the people close to you how much you love them. Make the most of the time you have here."

—GARY BROWN

**Amanda**  
**OTT**

# Kathryn POWELL

**A** divorced mom of sons Angelo, 28, and Nicholas, 22, and grandmother of 6-year-old Kaivyn, Kathryn “Kathy” Powell has worked as a supervisor at TimkenSteel for 22 years.

## LIFE

She did everything right.

She was current on all her annual health screenings, which includes a yearly mammogram.

Yet, she discovered her breast cancer through a self-examination.

## DIAGNOSIS

The Canton resident was diagnosed early in 2020.

“I was diagnosed in February of this year,” Powell said. “I wasn’t due for another mammogram until April. I thought, I’m not going to get worried until I see the doctor.”

## TREATMENT

Following her diagnosis, Powell said she consulted with a surgeon and decided to go another route.

“I started chemo in March,” she said. “I finished (in August). I’ll have an MRI to see how it’s progressed, then I’ll go back to the surgeon.”

## EXPERIENCE AT AULTMAN

Powell said the treatment at Aultman Hospital’s Breast Cancer Center has been top-notch.

“They’re wonderful,” she said, “including my doctor, Shruti Trehan. Everyone is so welcoming and nice. They make it easy.”

## CLOSING THOUGHTS

Powell noted that she had one maternal aunt who died from breast cancer.

“I’ve had other family members that have had cancer, but my aunt was the only one who had breast cancer,” she said.

Powell offers advice for people who may be facing breast cancer.

“Just try to have a positive attitude,” she said. “If you have a bad attitude or you’re really depressed, it’s going to make it worse. Have a positive outlook on it.”

“Also, just be current on all your testing, and especially do self-checks. I was up to date and it didn’t show. Be diligent about that.”

—CHARITA GOSHAY





**A**dvancements in medicine and technology mean breast cancer patients are living longer, and many cancers are now treated as chronic illnesses rather than terminal diseases.

Life expectancy, even for multiple stage 4 cancers, has risen.

“It’s not a stretch to tell a woman newly diagnosed with stage 4 breast cancer that her survival will be measured in years and not months,” Dr. Mika Cline, medical oncologist at Texas Oncology in Austin. “It’s not unusual for patients to be treated for stage 4 cancer while planning their children’s weddings, graduations, traveling and even continuing to work. That’s not true for everyone, of course, but we see these scenarios much more frequently than we used to.

“Given that, patients, caregivers and their oncology teams can focus on the impact of treatment and side

## A MATTER OF SURVIVAL: ADVANCES IN CHEMOTHERAPY ARE MAKING BREAST CANCER TREATABLE, NOT TERMINAL

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effects on quality of life, not just life expectancy,” she said.

### REDUCED SIDE EFFECTS

Because of new medications with reduced side effects, chemotherapy is now delivered in an outpatient setting rather than a hospital.

“The benefits are plentiful. Patients miss less work and sleep in their own beds. There’s less risk of infection, a higher level of function and more interaction with family, friends and co-workers who can help support the patient through treatment,” Cline said.

Chemotherapy sounds scary, but once a patient understands what to expect, most gear up and are motivated to get through it.

“Chemotherapy is certainly not something someone would choose to put themselves through, but once someone understands that it is necessary to prevent cancer recurrence or to stop cancer growth, the ultimate goal makes the idea more bearable,” Cline said.

Supportive measures now make some side effects of cancer treatment much less impactful than before.

“We’ve seen a sea change in management of nausea and vomiting. It used to be one of the scariest side effects,” Cline said.

Previously after chemotherapy, a patient may have been severely nauseated for days and there was nothing to do except bear it.

“Now, though it is still a pleasant surprise for me to hear that a patient had no nausea with his or her treatment, it is becoming more common. It’s not true for enough patients yet, but it’s getting there,” Cline said.

Another innovation is immunotherapy, which “involves boosting a patient’s immune system to fight off the cancer,” Cline said. “For decades, a great deal of our practice was in managing side effects of chemotherapy, especially the immunosuppressive side effects. We’ve had to get comfortable with therapies that may actually cause side effects as a result of immune stim-

ulation or from a now overactive immune system.”

### LESS EFFECT ON FERTILITY

While chemotherapy can affect a woman’s chances of becoming pregnant, innovations are improving the chances of preserving fertility.

“Fertility preservation gives patients peace of mind that they aren’t giving up on their views of their future if it includes children because they got this cancer diagnosis and are facing systemic therapy,” Cline said.

“When contemplating cancer treatment, it helps to remember that it’s a marathon and not a sprint. You, your loved ones and your oncology team all have the same goal, which is successful treatment with side effects impacting your life as minimally as possible. That said, cancer and its treatment are going to impact your life, so be patient with yourself and take it one day at a time,” Cline said. ■

—MELISSA ERICKSON  
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thank you!



Our greatest gratitude goes to **Aultman Hospital**, which, has made this crucial publication possible for the sixth year. Aultman is committed to helping you take charge of your breast health, offering comprehensive screening and diagnostic services for women and men through a coordinated approach of an interdisciplinary team of radiologists, surgeons, pathologists, nurses and technologists.

With Aultman's help, we have been able to showcase these amazing individuals, shining a spotlight on the courage and hope needed to fight breast cancer.



**Vita Boutique**, owned by one of this year's honorees (Elizabeth Amireh), provided each of our honorees with a mini shopping spree.



Big thanks to **Gervasi Vineyard** for hosting us for the honorees' photo shoot day. Our honorees each received a photo session at The Casa, and Gervasi provided each honoree with a \$50 gift card to be used at any Gervasi Vineyard property.



**Edge Hair Design & Spa**, provided each of our honorees with hair and makeup styling for the day of the photo shoot.



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