

Hope and Fun for Breast Cancer Survivors
Wendie Jo Sperber's Lasting Legacy to Women Everywhere
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By Blaise Nutter

A naturally gifted comedian, Wendie Jo Sperber shot to fame with Tom Hanks in the cross-dressing television comedy *Bosom Buddies*, becoming a fixture in some of the most memorable comedies of the 1980s. With supporting roles in movies such as Steven Spielberg's war comedy *1941* and Robert Zemeckis' massive hit *Back to the Future*, Sperber made friends all over Hollywood with her vibrant personality and comic timing. In 1997, when she was diagnosed with breast cancer, Sperber relied on those same powerful Hollywood friends to help her achieve her new dream: the weSPARK Cancer Support Center.

With her cancer in remission in 2001, Sperber recognized that the victims of cancer weren't the only ones who needed support; the families, caretakers, and friends all needed a place where they could rebuild their lives and rediscover a life of hope and joy. For help, Sperber turned to Nancy Allen, a long-time friend and star of Brian DePalma's *Blow Out* and the popular *Robocop* movies. With Allen's and cousin Marie Ritz's help, Sperber opened weSPARK's doors in the San Fernando Valley, offering free support groups to anyone and everyone who has ever been affected by cancer. Even with Sperber's passing in December 2005 from metastatic cancer, her exuberant joyful-in-the-face-of-adversity spirit lives on at weSPARK.

"We work with people to be their bridge back to their life, their bridge back to their relationships, to their work, to their family, to their friends," says Allen, who first worked with Sperber on Zemeckis' *I Wanna Hold Your Hand!* A licensed clinical social worker, Ritz helped Sperber design a set of support groups broken down by stage of the disease rather than the type of cancer, ensuring that guests get to speak with others going through medical issues similar to their own.

Allen oversees the spiritual side of weSPARK. With an emphasis on fun, these support groups attempt to unlock the creativity within and allow guests to once again express themselves openly. Using music, creative writing, yoga, and mah-jongg, Allen hopes that these spiritual activities help guests find peace: "Different things help them rebuild their lives. And maybe [they] just come in and have some fun, too. We're really big on fun here."

Looking toward the future, weSPARK just opened a satellite office in Santa Clarita and is aiming for three new locations in the next year: Burbank, Northridge, and Hollywood. Another new development is wePALS, a cross-country buddy system, putting people with similar issues in contact all across the country.

Of course, since all services at weSPARK are completely free, every single little donation helps. The Wendie Jo Sperber 9th Annual Celebrity Golf Classic, is coming up September 29, 2007 at Glen Annie Santa Barbara Golf Course and there's a reason why the event sells out every year: "Wendie's philosophy was, you put the fun in fundraisers," says Allen. "You want people to come and have a great time." The celebrity variety show, weSPARKLE, has also found great success, with past celebrity hosts including Hanks and John Ritter. Additionally, weSPARK

holds a number of celebrity poker tournaments throughout the year. For more information, visit weSpark's website at www.wespark.org or call (818) 906-3022.