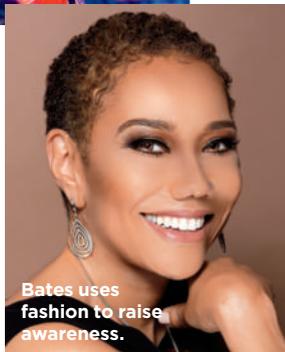




Breast cancer survivors work the runway each year.



Bates uses fashion to raise awareness.

“When they hit the runway, everyone’s excited to see the face of breast cancer.”

—BARBARA BATES

The doctor at the hospital where Bates was diagnosed recommended a double mastectomy, which would remove both breasts. Her preacher encouraged her to seek a second opinion. She did and was given other treatment options. She decided on a lumpectomy, which removed the tumor from her left breast, followed by chemotherapy and radiation. After a year and a half of treatment, she was cancer-free. “I was renewed,” Bates says. “I had new cells, new

hair, new skin and a new way of thinking.”

Bates’s new lease on life inspired her to expand the focus of her foundation to advocate and educate other women on breast cancer. “I didn’t have the right information about breast cancer, so I was devastated when I got it,” she says. “I wasn’t getting mammograms and had the wrong information about who was at risk.”

Black women are 40 percent more likely to die from breast cancer than White women, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Early diagnosis is key to our survival. Bates decided to bring awareness by hosting the Knocking Out Breast Cancer fashion show in 2012, which featured 50 models—all breast cancer survivors. “There is an undeniable sisterhood for those who have gone through and are going through this journey,” shares Zara Johnson, a six-year breast cancer survivor and model for the Chicago event. “Some models are nervous before they walk the runway. I remind them we’re beating cancer so that audience is in no way scary.”

Surviving breast cancer with style is a growing effort for Black women. In Baltimore, wig lover Crystal Hughes collects and donates wigs to hospitals for women undergoing treatment through her organization, Wig Capitol Foundation. “Many women we serve never thought they would wear a wig,” Hughes says. “We educate them and try to give them confidence as they weather this storm.”

The Barbara Bates Foundation is now preparing for its fourth annual fashion show and has generated close to \$500,000 to focus on breast cancer awareness and education in Chicago’s urban neighborhoods. “When there are 50 women getting their hair and makeup done, it’s a heavenly feeling,” Bates says. “When they hit the runway, everyone’s excited to see what the face of breast cancer is—sometimes it’s with a bald head. The reality is that we can fight together to find a cure.”

Strut. Fight Cancer. Repeat.

BLACK WOMEN ACROSS THE COUNTRY ARE BATTLING THE DISEASE WITH STYLE
BY MEGAN SIMS

Chicago fashion designer Barbara Ann Bates’s days were filled with dressing chic clients including Oprah Winfrey when she felt a lump in her breast in 2009. She didn’t think it was a big deal until she mentioned it to her pal Linda Hall. Since she had recently lost a friend to breast cancer, Hall encouraged Bates to have the lump examined. “Yes, I think you have breast cancer,” she was told at a hospital days later. A biopsy confirmed the fashion lover had stage III hormone receptor (HR)-positive breast cancer.

Bates was no stranger to trying times. After an unexpected pregnancy in her teens, she persevered and graduated high school a year early with her young son in the audience. She went on to become a self-taught fashion entrepreneur and started The Barbara Bates Foundation, which provided prom dresses and suits for students fighting difficult circumstances. But everything came to a halt with her diagnosis.

“It was a numbing experience,” Bates says. “You can’t move forward with any other thoughts except, *What’s going to happen to me?*”