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MIAMI-DADE

## Two Miami-Dade women raise money to fight breast cancer

Two breast cancer survivors pooled their resources, friends and business associates to raise money for cancer awareness and research.



Chef Sandra Stefani (left) and author Miriam "Mimi" Rutland, both breast cancer survivors, teamed up to hold a fundraiser for the Susan G. Komen Foundation at Stefani's restaurant, Casa Toscana Ristorante. UM NEWS SERVICE / FOR THE MIAMI HERALD

- Breast cancer: The beginning, not the end

- Photo

BY VIRGINIA GIL  
UM NEWS SERVICE

With nothing in common but a life-threatening illness, Sandra Stefani and Miriam "Mimi" Rutland discovered a kinship they would use to help others.

Both women were diagnosed with breast cancer at age 44 and used their battle with the disease as inspiration to fulfill their lifelong dreams. Stefani opened her first restaurant, Casa Toscana Ristorante, at 7001 Biscayne Blvd., in Miami's historic MIMo district.

Rutland set out to write and travel, penning a children's book.

The two women, who met by chance one day at Stefani's restaurant, teamed up to organize the Pink Hat Ladies Brunch, a community fundraiser this month for the Miami/Fort Lauderdale affiliate of the Susan G. Komen Foundation, which raises money for cancer research and prevention.

"Breast cancer is not the end but the beginning, and my beginning was Casa Toscana," Stefani said.

Rutland, 51, a Miami Shores resident, said she was "kicked into first gear" after being diagnosed with breast cancer. She penned her first book, *Miss Pistachio's Big Day*, which inspired a doll and a sequel that is in the works.

As the two women overcame cancer and pursued their dreams, their chance meeting inspired them to share their zeal for life with the community.

Rutland had stopped into the MIMo restaurant.

Stefani, 50, a resident of El Portal, recognized Rutland from a profile in The Miami Herald. She told Rutland that she, too, was a breast cancer survivor and suggested the two host a fundraiser.

"I was eating in her restaurant one day and she said we should have a little champagne brunch, and it sort of took off from there," Rutland said.

The ambitious endeavor took five months to plan and included a hunt for 55 pink sun hats guests would don during the Nov. 1 event.

Spearheading the search was Gladys de Thomas, a resident of Westchester. "We had to go all over the