



Print Page

Breast cancer survivors build bridges, cultural studies center at Two Medicine.

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A construction project with a difference started in August at Two Medicine. A group of breast cancer survivors from around the world traveled to the area to spend a week building a cultural studies center for the students at De La Salle Blackfeet School.

The project is an initiative of Amazon Heart, www.amazonheart.org, an international organization that runs worldwide adventures for women who have been diagnosed with breast cancer. The group of 11 women raised over \$20,000 to pay for the project, as well as their own travel expenses to come to Browning and build the center with their own hands.

Three of the women traveled from Australia to take part, with the rest of the group from all over the United States. In between working on the cultural studies center, the women had the opportunity to visit Glacier National Park and meet in the evening with local members of the Blackfeet community who have volunteered their time to cook the group's meals. While working on the project, the group stayed in tipis at the site.

Carol Murray from Blackfeet Community College visited the group to share stories of Blackfeet tradition and culture, and over the course of the week other speakers shared their insights and knowledge.

The group traveled to a two-day retreat led by Pauline Matt, as part of their immersion in Blackfeet culture.

Amazon Heart was founded in 2004 by two young breast cancer survivors, one from Australia and one from California, to provide changing peer support adventures for women diagnosed with breast cancer. Their programs include Amazon Heart Thunder - a week, one thousand mile motorcycle adventure riding Harley-Davidsons across the United Kingdom, United States and Australia; Amazon Heart Expedition - physical challenges including climbing mountains in New Zealand; and Amazon Heart Odyssey - local community projects like the Two Medicine construction project.

Last year Amazon Heart held its first Odyssey event in Sri Lanka, where a group of breast cancer survivors built houses for poor families in the slums of Colombo. After the Two Medicine project, the next Odyssey will be a trip to India this December to build an orphanage for tsunami survivors and AIDS orphans.

"The experience of breast cancer impacts everyone who is forced to deal with it in profound and sometimes unexpected ways," Megan Dwyer, co-founder of Amazon Heart and one of the participants in the Odyssey.

"For those of us who have been through the experience of a diagnosis, there seems to be a common theme of wanting to live right now, in this moment. And there is also a strong need to connect with others who share this common bond. Amazon Heart is exactly that, women living with breast cancer coming together to form a supportive community, taking on a new challenge at life to the fullest.

"Many young survivors tell us that after their diagnosis they want to find a meaningful way to give back to the community. Traveling around the world to work with on projects like the cultural studies center for De La Salle Blackfeet School has clearly struck with women across the globe."

Meredith Campbell, Amazon Heart's other co-founder and also a participant, adds, "Breast cancer survivors speak a common language of experience, but we have too few opportunities to share our wisdom with each other and to make our voices heard in the community.

"Amazon Heart's programs bring survivors together to raise awareness of our unique needs and to continue along our own personal path of growth and healing by building a supportive community. Already the conversations and relationships building among the women are amazing."

For more information, go to <http://www.amazonheart.org/AHOdyssey/> or to learn more about De La Salle Blackfeet go to <http://www.delasalleblackfeet.org>



Volunteers from Amazon Heart, a group of breast cancer survivors, worked this month on a new center for the De La Salle Blackfeet School.