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## Woman finds strength in family, work during cancer battle

**Felicia Frazar**  
The Seguin Gazette

Debra Martinez has spent the past year fighting breast cancer.

When she received her diagnosis in May 2018, it was devastating.

"As I began to navigate through the unknown waters of preparing my own funeral, cancer, chemo, radiation and surgery, it was hard for me to see a future," she said. "My family and I were so scared we dared not

mention 'the future.'"

The 42-year-old mother of two said she found the strength and confidence to push through with the help of her family, friends and co-workers.

"My bosses at Community Council of South Central Texas, Inc. (CCSCT) really helped me more than they'll ever know," she said.

Prior to the diagnosis, Martinez began preparing information to get her certification in the Community

Action Professionals program.

There are three steps to completing the process — a candidate data form, an executive skills portfolio and four 750-word essays demonstrating management practices, leadership style, vision and values of Community Action and how her work contributed to CCSCT.

The candidate data form and test includes a point system that scores potential candidates on training and

experiences.

"In the middle of working to complete this assessment, I had a mastectomy," she said. "After a few weeks off of work, I was back at it; submitting my Candidate Data Form and began working on the next step, an Executive Skills Portfolio."

Martinez then began working on her Executive Skills Portfolio, a 50-page document that included research, study materials,



Courtesy photo

Debra Martinez enjoys a walk through Christmas trees. Martinez is currently battling breast cancer.

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## SURVIVOR

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and data collection from her facilitation of focus group meetings in CCSCT's coverage area.

"My project consisted of facilitating numerous focus group meetings throughout our service area of 23 counties to collect current data on the needs of the low-income," she said. "This was organized and executed over a three-month period."

Martinez began to work on her portfolio, but was hospitalized shortly after. That didn't deter her from continuing to work on the CCAP process.

"The executive director and financial controller of CCSCT continued to encourage me to complete my certification," she said. "They never demonstrated any hesitation on my ability or my future. Their confidence that I would have

a future helped give me strength and inspired me to complete the certification process and pass the exam all while going through chemo and radiation."

Another setback for Martinez came from her insurer, who sent a letter denying her treatment of life-saving radiation therapy, she said.

Martinez appealed the decision, and eventually won, however, she had to meet the deductible before starting the treatment.

"I began daily radiation, the second week in January every Monday thru Friday for six-and-a-half weeks," she said. "I worked Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m., then drove to New Braunfels for radiation therapy. During this time, I consolidated all the information required for the portfolio along with an introduction, table of contents, charts and graphs of data collected during focus group meetings and submitted it."

While undergoing radiation treatment, working and studying for an exam, Martinez received the news that she would have to undergo another surgery.

"On April 23, I had my ovaries removed in an attempt to reduce my chances for reoccurrence because the type of breast cancer I have is directly affected by estrogen," she said. "I was out of work for over a week. The tough part was accepting another part that made me a woman must be removed."

Doctors told Martinez it would take five years cancer free before she would be considered in remission, another deflating moment, she said.

"That was another tough pill to swallow," she said. "I was looking forward to hearing those words, 'you are in remission.'"

While she longs to hear those key words, Martinez has a message for all women.

"I hope at least one per-

son sees this and does a self-exam and gets it addressed immediately," she said.

Her perseverance in finishing the CCAP program came to fruition in September during a conference in Chicago, where Martinez walked the stage, officially earning her certification.

"The CCAP program and CCSCT empowered me to develop a plan to take positive steps that impact my life," she said. "CCSCT's board of directors, Executive Director Bobby Deike and Controller Glen Muenchow's confidence in me and my ability to successfully complete this rigorous program I began before my diagnosis helped to give me strength and inspired me to be positive and successful."

*Felicia Frazar is the managing editor of the Seguin Gazette. You can e-mail her at felicia.frazar@seguingazette.com.*

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