

Featured Alumna: Claudia FARINOLA, Class of 1982

Honoring Breast Cancer Awareness Month



October is Breast Cancer Awareness Month, and this year we are proud to spotlight **Claudia FARINOLA '82**—a breast cancer survivor, entrepreneur, and advocate whose journey highlights the importance of early detection, community, and the values instilled during her years at Duchesne.

“My name is Claudia Farinola ('82), and I am a breast cancer survivor. I was diagnosed at age 43, just six months after my sister **Tina FARINOLA '81** was also diagnosed with breast cancer. Since only 5% to 10% of breast cancer cases are hereditary and neither Tina nor I carry the inherited gene mutations associated with the disease, our experience underscores the importance of awareness and early detection, even in the absence of a known genetic risk.”

Claudia stresses the importance of self-awareness and persistence. “It is so important to take charge of your health and advocate for yourself. Breast self-examinations should be a regular part of your routine. Pay attention to any changes in your body and share them with your physician.”

Her sister’s experience shaped her own. “Tina’s journey began when she discovered a lump during a self-breast exam. She immediately scheduled a mammogram, which came back negative to any masses. Knowing her body and advocating for herself, she insisted on further testing. The results of an ultrasound revealed a 5 cm mass previously undetected due to heterogeneously dense breast tissue. Because Tina trusted in herself and pushed for answers, she received the treatment she needed. Today, she too is a breast cancer survivor.”

When Claudia went for her own mammogram, she faced the same situation. “My results were identical to Tina’s, negative to any masses. I refused to accept that as the final word. For peace

of mind, I insisted on an ultrasound. That decision changed my life as three masses revealed as invasive breast cancer. Thanks to Tina's example, I pushed for more answers, and it saved my life."

She also learned the importance of having a support system. "Another lesson I carried with me from Tina's experience was the importance of never going alone to medical appointments. Being the patient is overwhelming, and it's easy to miss or forget critical information. I was fortunate that my mother stepped into the role of my advocate and companion to all appointments. She took detailed notes and carefully reviewed clinical records with me. If something seemed unclear, be sure to ask questions. Knowledge is power. Together we were able to successfully navigate my treatments. Having an advocate by your side during treatment is not only invaluable for navigating the complexity of medical care, but also deeply comforting."

In addition to her family, Claudia was lifted up by her Duchesne classmates. "When I was first diagnosed with breast cancer, it was remarkable how quickly my Duchesne family of friends rallied around me. So many classmates including **Mary Kay DULWORTH Doebbler '82, Julie TEMPLET Strohmaier '82, Frieda FROMEN '82, Becky RIBBECK Brinkley '82, and Emily SMITH Cannell '82,** reached out with care and compassion. For those in Houston, we would gather to talk about breast cancer, discuss my upcoming treatments, and how I was feeling. I also received a steady stream of heartfelt notes and thoughtful gifts that carried me through treatment. Their unwavering support is a beautiful example of the sisterhood of relationships we form and cherish from our time at Duchesne."

Claudia credits Duchesne with shaping her faith and leadership. "Duchesne paved the way for a strong foundation as I moved forward into the next chapters of my life. It gave me the tools to believe in myself, to envision a life without boundaries, to have confidence, to show compassion to others, and to give back. These values continue to guide me today."

That commitment to service now extends to her advocacy and professional life. "One of the ways I strive to honor what Duchesne instilled in me is through my volunteer work on the board of [Taking Initiative to Survive](#), where we raise funds in support of Houston's The Rose organization. [The Rose](#) provides breast health care to all women, regardless of their ability to pay. It is deeply meaningful for me to serve in this way, knowing I am carrying forward the mission of love, service, and advocacy that Duchesne so beautifully planted in my heart."

Claudia is also a business owner and co-founder of [Deluxe Vanilla Extracts](#) with her husband, Brad Dorsey, co-owner of [Crave Cupcakes](#). "Both my husband, Brad Dorsey, and I are proud graduates of the University of Houston's Hilton College of Hotel and Restaurant Management, and seasoned professionals in the hospitality industry. Many in the Duchesne community may

remember me from my years working alongside my family at Pino's Italian Restaurant, a Houston institution for nearly 45 years. Brad is the co-owner of Crave Cupcakes, which operates two locations here in Houston."

Claudia sums up her life and message to the Duchesne community this way: "I believe some of the greatest gifts Duchesne gave me were confidence in myself, the wisdom to make sound decisions, the desire to give back, and the determination to be part of the solution. This small list alone has brought great rewards to my life."