

Adams community remembers 'extraordinary' Jennifer LeVan

BY JIM HALE
Times Staff Writer

Business owner, anti-cancer activist, supporter of the arts, accomplished caterer and cook, and motorcycle enthusiast Jennifer LeVan died Saturday after a forceful fight against breast cancer.

The managing partner of Battlefield Harley-Davidson in Straban Township was deeply involved in bettering the Adams County community, building a remarkably broad network of friends and colleagues.

LeVan, 56, devoted herself to a wide spectrum of efforts, from the renovation of the Ma-

jestic Theater and historic Lincoln train station in downtown Gettysburg to aiding children, honoring veterans, and supporting the Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals.

"The Majestic Theater will honor Jennifer LeVan's passing in the age-old Broadway theater tradition of dimming its marquee lights for one minute" tonight at 7 p.m., said Majestic Founding Executive Director Jeffrey Gabel.

A celebration of the life of Jennifer Sweeney LeVan is to take place at a later date. Memorial donations can be sent (See LEVAN on Page A6)



GETTYSBURG TIMES FILE PHOTO

ARTS PATRONS — Jennifer and David LeVan are pictured at the grand opening of the Majestic Theater at the Jennifer and David LeVan Performing Arts Center in November of 2005. Jennifer, 56, passed away Feb. 14. Her obituary appears on Page A2.

LeVan

(Continued from Page A1)

to Pink Out Fund, 1150 Carlisle St. Suite 10, Hanover, PA 17331.

An obituary appears on Page 2 of today's *Gettysburg Times*.

LeVan "was an extraordinary lady who was an indefatigable supporter of the arts and philanthropic causes for families in need. When she got behind a cause, she put her whole heart and soul into it," Gabel said.

She and her husband David LeVan "co-chaired the \$16.5 million fundraising campaign for the 2004-2005 restoration and expansion of the Majestic Theater," Gabel said.

"In recognition of their philanthropic leadership, Gettysburg College named the Gettysburg Hotel Annex which houses the Majestic Theater, the Jennifer and David LeVan Performing Arts Center in 2006," Gabel said, also noting that "in 2008, Jennifer received the Callie Award, a Celebration of Exceptional Women in Adams County for her dedication to the arts."

Last year, LeVan created Pink Journey of Lights, distributing hundreds of strings of lights to raise awareness and money for three Adams County funds: Pink Out Women's Cancer Fund, Adams County Breast Cancer Free Mammogram Fund, and the Gettysburg Hospital Foundation Adams County Cancer Patient Help Fund.

She served on the executive board of the Mid-Atlantic Women's Motorcycle Rally, which brings women motorcyclists together and benefits two Pennsylvania-based organizations that help women diagnosed with breast cancer: the Pink Out Women's Cancer Fund and H.O.P.E.

LeVan is survived by her husband, David LeVan; stepson Todd, and his wife Melissa; grandchildren Hayden and Trace; and sister-in-law Hannah Owens.

Born in Pottstown in 1958, she grew up in a rural farm town and attended Owen J. Roberts High School before turning her focus to Philadelphia, where she had careers in modeling and the restaurant and hospitality industry, including working with then-unknown celebrity chef Emeril Lagasse. Her work caught the attention of catering mogul Raymond Haldeman, leading her to manage exclusive events for celebrities such as movie icon Audrey Hepburn and rock legend David Bowie.

In 1981, she met railroad executive David LeVan and married him a decade later as his career at Conrail began to take off. As he rose to CEO, she pivoted from the long hours of catering business and became a ski instructor.

After David retired, they took a motorcycle tour through Europe before settling in his hometown, where they opened Battlefield Harley-Davidson. She also opened the Just Jennifer gallery and framery in downtown Gettysburg.

She helped the Gettysburg Retail Merchants Association begin "First Fridays," modeled

after a program in Philadelphia designed to bring shoppers downtown, and became a strong advocate for the Adams County Arts Council.

"It was an honor working with her and for her" for 15 years, said Meredith Catchings, events coordinator and general merchandise supervisor at Battlefield Harley-Davidson.

"I can't even explain how much she's taught me," Catchings said Sunday.

"She made me a stronger person and made me realize my meaning in life is basically helping people," she said, adding that LeVan taught her by example.

"Her passing is going to make us all work that much harder and continue her legacy of helping people in the community," Catchings said.

In full agreement was Stacy Hobbs, who worked with LeVan on the Pink Journey of Lights.

Those involved remain "absolutely" dedicated to keeping the event going and "getting it to where she wanted it to be," Hobbs said, noting that LeVan "didn't think small. She thought big."

LeVan was "a very strong independent woman and very giving," Hobbs said Sunday.

"She did a lot for the area, and she didn't want a lot of recognition for what she did, even though what she did was amazing," Hobbs said.

LeVan's illness "was like a roller coaster with a lot of ups and downs," Hobbs said, "but every time I saw her, she would still have a smile on her face."

That smile also remains with Wrae Wene, a friend LeVan gained through the Mid-Atlantic Women's Motorcycle Rally.

"Her eyes sparkled, and she had a grin that surpasses her face," Wene said, also recalling LeVan's "deep belly laugh."

The two frequently cooked together, and Wene remembered a gathering of friends at LeVan's home. It was summer, but LeVan invoked a family tradition from Thanksgiving, asking each person at the big round table to say what they were most thankful for.

LeVan was "more interested in what made other people's lives feel enriched, rather than dwelling on her illness. That's the kind of human being she was," Wene said.

LeVan "gave of herself, her time, her prayers, her thoughts, her energy," Wene said.

"I learned to love people more and to laugh more" from LeVan, Wene said, and "I learned to never stop, because she never stopped."

LeVan was "the most energetic person I've ever known," Bill Monahan said Sunday.

"She was a wonderful, spectacular retailer," Monahan said, and also someone with "a huge heart."

"I always marveled at how there was always some charity event at the dealership almost every weekend," said the former Gettysburg Borough Council member, expressing admiration for LeVan's involvement in everything from the Majestic to First Friday.

The wide range of LeVan's contributions, including many things not publicized, makes it clear "how generous and kind she was," Monahan said.

LeVan was not only "a marketing genius" and "a gourmet cook," *Gettysburg Times* columnist and close friend Fred Snyder said Sunday, but also "a wonderful, complete woman. She had brains, she had looks, and she rode a Harley. What else can I say?"

"The community has lost a pillar," Snyder said, pointing to LeVan's efforts on behalf of the Make-a-Wish truck convoy and her work against child abuse.

"We lost a really good friend and the community lost a woman who supported it," said Betty Snyder.

LeVan's passing is "a tragic loss for our community," agreed Chris Glatfelter, executive director of the Adams County Arts Council.

The LeVans "were so generous to the Arts Council, not just financially, but Jen did many things for us where she donated her time," Glatfelter said.

"When she got involved in the early 2000s, you could see a big jump in what the Arts Council was able to do," Glatfelter said.

She also pointed to the "incredible spread" that LeVan herself prepared for many years for the council's garden party.

"She meant a lot to our organization," Glatfelter said, also noting Just Jennifer's sponsorship of the council's recyclable art contest for local students, support for children's theater programming, and LeVan's work to prepare for the silent auction at the council's annual masquerade party.

LeVan was just as valuable to many other community efforts, Glatfelter said.

"She leaves an incredible legacy of good work," Glatfelter said.

"It will be a long time before we see another woman with a legacy like that of Jen LeVan," she said.

Plus, Glatfelter said, LeVan was simply "a fine person and a lot of fun to know."

Another former Borough Council member joined Monahan in lauding LeVan.

"I loved being in Jen LeVan's company," Jamie Fleet said Sunday.

"Her energy was contagious and her passion for doing good works was really unrivaled," he said.

"We didn't agree on much, but her very thorough and

lengthy discussions of issues of the day, and her poised questioning and thoughtful analysis of current events have definitely made me a better thinker, a better communicator, and a better negotiator," Fleet said.

"I loved our debates and she definitely made me a better person," said Fleet, who is now chief of staff for U.S. Sen. Maria Cantwell, D-Wash.

"We all owe her so much," Fleet said of LeVan, calling her "absolutely devoted to the community, in some ways publicly and in some ways not. It's impossible to measure the contribution she made."

Former Borough Council member Ted Streeter recalled LeVan as "a warm person, very direct and not at all pretentious."

"She loved her community and worked very hard to better it," he said Sunday, "most often in ways that the public will never learn of."

"She left Gettysburg and the world a far better place because of what she did. I will miss her," Streeter said.