

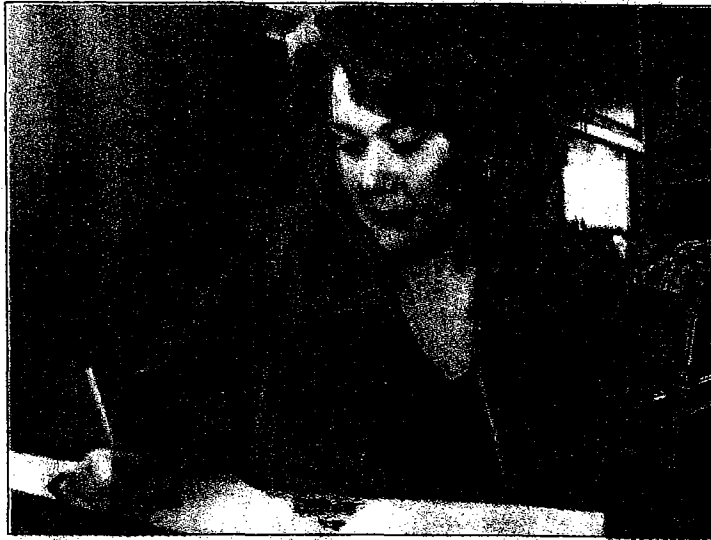
Ioannoni's new, personal fight

Diagnosed with carcinoid cancer last year, she now acts as advocate for patients

BY COREY LAROCQUE
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NIAGARA FALLS – Since becoming a city alderman in 1999, Carolynn Ioannoni has never been known to back away from a political fight. Now, as the survivor of a rare form of cancer, she's getting ready to start a new fight as an advocate for patients of carcinoid cancer.

"I've lobbied for everything under the sun," says Ioannoni, who turned 40 years old two weeks ago. Living with carcinoid cancer makes her appreciate reach-



Mike DiBattista, The Review

Ald. Carolynn Ioannoni has a new fight and it's not political – she is now an advocate for patients of carcinoid cancer. She was diagnosed with the rare form of cancer last year.

ing the milestone birthday because "the alternative sucks."

She spent the weekend in

London, Ont., talking publicly for the first time about the cancer she was formally diagnosed with a year ago.

She acted as the master of ceremonies for a conference of the Canadian Carcinoid Cancer and Neuroendocrine Tumours Support Group. It helps people with carcinoid cancer who live in Ontario and western New York. Ioannoni joined the group after she was diagnosed last year.

"I'm going to meet 65 people with the same type of cancer I have, learn as much as I can. Then, I'm going to speak for them," she said.

Because there are relatively few carcinoid patients compared to those with other forms of cancer, they feel it's hard to get attention, Ioannoni said. Carcinoid patients want more attention from the Canadian Cancer Society and to encourage Ontario's Ministry of Health to spend more money on research and treatment.

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"I'm never shy about my opinion on anything. I'm sitting back complaining there's no awareness about carcinoid cancer, and I'm not doing anything to raise awareness."

Awareness of carcinoid cancer – now known medically as neuroendocrine tumours – might be higher in Niagara Falls than other cities due to the high-profile case of Justin Brown, the local boy who died from it last year at the age of 16.

Ioannoni was diagnosed a year ago, but doctors have been monitoring it for about three-and-a-half years. Doctors started to question

what was wrong after she had a gall bladder attack in the summer of 2001.

She has four tumours in her stomach. They're small and localized and don't seem to be growing, prompting Ioannoni to say "the glass is half-full" when talking about her cancer diagnosis.

"I've been told mine may stay dormant like that forever. Mine may never grow. I'm pretty fortunate."

Her first instinct was to have surgery to remove the tumours, but she has opted instead for a monthly injection of a treatment drug, Sandostatin. The drug's manufacturer

*The Niagara
Falls Review
May 2, 2005*

Novartis sponsored the conference where Ioannoni spoke.

Ioannoni says her immediate concern when she learned what was wrong was for her seven-year-old son. She said she recalled fearing she wouldn't be around to see him get married. Ioannoni and her family – husband Carmine and four children – have been dealing with the condition for a couple of years now.

"I'm way past the 'Oh, woe is me' stage though I do have my 'Oh, woe is me' moments."

Ioannoni says she would be "lost" without her husband's support. Her

sister-in-law, a registered nurse, has also helped by administering the treatment every month, saving her a trip to Toronto.

When she told other council members, she discovered political differences were quickly put aside. Longtime friends like Janice Wing and Kim Craitor said they would do whatever she needed. Ioannoni used to be at odds over the years with aldermen Victor Pietrangelo and Wayne Campbell, back when city council was divided into the so-called A-Team and B-Team camps. But she says she was pleasantly surprised by how quickly they came to

her side.

"Some of us were at each others' throats for three years and they were the first to come and say, 'What do you need?'"

Ever the politician, Ioannoni says she didn't talk publicly about her cancer because she was concerned people might think it would stop her from doing her job as an alderman, a job she says she loves.

"It's not stopping me with my kids. It's not stopping me with any of my future plans ... If anything, it has made me less tolerant of B.S. in my life and in my job, particularly in my job."