

Bosom buddies make art for cancer fundraiser, Bra-inspired work to go on auction to help survivors (Daily Hampshire Gazette)

By PHOEBE MITCHELL Staff Writer

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NORTHAMPTON – Bra discussions usually involve the word "cup" or "support" or a letter of the alphabet from A to E. Considered from that angle alone, the show at the Northampton Center for the Arts this month and next is positively liberating, with its slightly risqué name – "Show Us Your Bra" – and its 110 juried entries, imaginative and funny works of art, all inspired by bras.

The show culminates Saturday at the Northampton Center for the Arts with a gala benefit auction, where entries will be auctioned off for The Breast Form Fund, a Northampton-based nonprofit organization providing uninsured and underinsured women with post-mastectomy prostheses and bras. Judith Fine, owner of Gazebo, a Northampton lingerie and post-mastectomy shop, who organized the first show 10 years ago, said the fund has distributed close to \$100,000 to more than 100 women in need of prostheses. Fine said a major source for The Breast Form Fund is this weekend's "Show Us Your Bra" event.

"Organizers decided to limit entries in this year's contest to one per person (or group), because it received so many entries – 220 – for the event two years ago. Fine said the bra creations submitted by this year's "bratistes" include three-dimensional human-size or miniature bra-inspired pieces, one made by five mothers and five daughters called "Best Buds" and another fashioned from Coca-Cola cans by a Northampton High School graduate.

Among the standouts, said Fine, is a miniature black-beaded bra submitted by Judi Heskell, owner of the Beaders' Paradise on Main Street who submitted it in honor of her close friend, actor, singer and educator Felicia Shpall of Shelburne Falls, who died of breast cancer in April. "She was a very special person. Very loved," said Heskell, in a phone interview from her store Thursday. "She was 34 years old when she died. It's a very horrible thing." Called "Felicia's

Dance," the piece, said Heskell, was designed with Shpall "in her heart."

Fine said many entries were made in memory of someone affected by the disease. Chapin Strickland of South Deerfield, who works in Bill Brough's jewelry store in Northampton, submitted a bra with a Harley Davidson motorcycle theme in honor of friend and fellow employee Karen Holhut of Hatfield, who manages the jewelry store. Strickland said she decided to surprise Holhut, who is a "big Harley fan" and a breast cancer survivor, by making a piece for this year's "Show Us Your Bra" contest. The piece comes with grommets, piping, tassels, miniature wheels and most everything else associated with Harleys.

Saturday's gala will include a silent and live auction of bra pieces, and people will be able to place orders for a 2006 calendar featuring the contest's standouts. Fine said she hopes to raise \$20,000 at the event. She said about \$20,000 has already been contributed by local businesses and some \$10,000 also was raised at an Oct. 6 fundraiser called "Kick Off Your Bra." Earlier this week she helped a woman get fitted for a prosthesis at her store using money from The Breast Form Fund, Fine noted. "It's incidents like that that make the whole thing worth it," she said. "It puts us in position to help a lot of women who deserve the dignity of getting a prosthesis."

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