

**January 2, 2008** - *Art that heals one, aids many*, by Randy Medcalf - Northwest Explorer, Tucson, AZ.

Linda Ahearn is making a plaster casting of her sister's breast. When she's finished, she'll paint the casting and give it as gift to her older sister, Marianne Gouveia, a breast cancer patient who has since had a double mastectomy. Tomorrow, Ahearn is making 50 such casting of Marianne's breast. They'll be given to well-established artist across the country, and painted for sale, with funds to support the Susan G. Komen Foundation. "Linda asked me if I would mind if she could do a casting," Gouveia said. "I said 'No, go right ahead'.

While she works, Ahearn, owner of the Toscana Studio and Gallery in Oro Valley, wears a long jean vest splattered with years of paint, plaster and clay. The vest's sleeves are ripped off at the tattered seam along the shoulder to expose her red long-sleeved undershirt....more

Originally, she wanted to give her sister a therapeutic piece of art. Very rapidly, the intention expanded to helping to fight against breast cancer. Ahearn talked to a few people about what she was working on, and the idea started rolling. It soon gained the title "Goodbye Girls, Hello Life". I already have about five local artists interested," Ahearn said. Everyone has someone in his or her lives that are affected by breast cancer, whether they have it, or know someone who does.

Ahearn is planning an official call to artists using the Greater Oro Valley Arts Council, newspapers, word of mouth, and the Pima Arts Council to let as possible know what she wants to do. Ahearn has a couple pieces of artwork that hold special places in her heart. It is artwork that takes her back to a moment in time, and can make her feel happy, glad, or sad. The little bronze sculpture she did in 1997 of a little girl kneeling on the ground is one of those pieces. "I made that sculpture and then a few weeks after, I broke my neck," Ahearn said. "I lost the use of my left arm." Basically bedridden for eight years, she did not paint a canvas or sculpt a ball of clay.

“I had a lot of years to think about what I wanted to do if I ever could use my arm again.” In 2004, Ahearn had a successful second surgery, giving back the use of her arm. Now, four years later, Ahearn has another meaningful art piece that marks the beginning of a new chapter. It is the casting of her sister's breasts. “This one really strikes home for me. It’s one I am very passionate about,” Ahearn said. Ahearn and Gouveia lost their mother to breast cancer in 1986 after a 13-year struggle with the disease.

Their mother died at age 62. “She had a real battle,” Ahearn said, now 45. “The doctors found [cancer], they did a lumpectomy, it came back, they did another lumpectomy, it came back, they did mastectomy, it came back, it surfaced (on) the skin.” Ahearn trailed off. “She had it rough.” While using this tragedy in their lives, the sisters are looking to make a change in breast cancer education.

“I have to have an MRI every time I receive a mammogram,” Ahearn said. She is well aware if you have a family history of breast cancer, particularly when it is in both breasts, the odds of getting the disease are increased significantly. According to the American Cancer Society, many doctors believe early detection saves thousands of lives each year.

Early detection improves the chances of diagnosing and treating the cancer successfully. It is recommended women from ages 20 to 40 should have a mammogram every three years. After the age of 40, women should have one each year. Gouveia is hoping this project can help get a message to women everywhere. “It wants me want to take action,” Gouveia said. “It makes me want to tell other women, 'You have got to be on top of this yourself. Because if you don't, this is what happens'.”