

## HERRALA: Walters woman empowered by little-known technique to preserve hair

FROM PAGE A1

with chemotherapy.

But in her online research about chemo and its affects on the body, such as hair, "I simply googled 'Cold caps,'" she said.

That led her to The Rapunzel Project (www.rapunzel-project.org), named after the young woman in the fairy tale whose hair grew and grew ... and grew.

The non-profit organization is "dedicated to helping chemotherapy patients keep their hair during treatment," as stated on the website."

From there, the 68-year-old learned of four or five other companies that offer a treatment to minimize or prevent major hair loss.

Extensive research helped

Herrala and her husband to decide on Arctic Cold Caps (www.articcoldcaps.com) as the preferred source.

"The Arctic Cold Cap System uses super-cooled caps to constrict the blood vessels in your scalp, thereby protecting your hair follicles from damage," as noted on that company's website.

The chilling is accomplished using dry ice. In her case, Roberts Oxygen in Portsmouth has been her source. Fifty to 60 pounds are needed each treatment, done every three weeks; ACC arranged for a discount.

Doing this was not simply a matter of vanity about the hair falling out.

Instead, "It gave me a little bit of power," she said.

Through her ordeal, Herra-

la has gotten support not only from her husband and family, but also friends and church. She gave a shout out of thanks to Franklin Congregational Christian for being so supportive.

On that last day of treatment, Mary Ann Riddick was there to assist in putting on and taking off the caps.

Riddick and Herrala have known each other for years. They met while teaching at Nansemond-Suffolk Academy; fourth grade and kindergarten, respectively.

"She's an inspiration," Riddick said of her friend and former colleague.

Back in the treatment room, they prepare for the chemo and cold caps. Herrala is dressed warmly, and even has additional cover-

ings in shades and tints of — what else? — pink.

Riddick puts on thick gloves to protect her hands as reaches in for the first cap. With her hands she molds the covering so it will fit properly. There's already one net covering the hair. She and Herrala work together to get the cap on just right, which includes securing with straps.

The process takes only several minutes, but it's one that will be repeated several times before, during and after chemotherapy.

On the way home mid-afternoon, they stop at the parking lot of Open Door Church to remove a cap and place on another. Herrala said everything was done by 6 p.m.

Although Arctic Cold Caps have helped her, she cautioned that they are not for everybody.

"It depends on what chemicals are used. They [the caps] are better for some than others," she said.

"Yes, my hair has thinned through 'shedding,' but I cannot begin to tell you how good it makes me feel NOT to be bald and have the constant reminder of the horri-

ble disease I am fighting," Herrala continued. "I look in the mirror and I see myself pretty 'normal' looking. No baldness, no wig, no turban. Even my doctors and other medical caretakers have been pleasantly surprised with the results so far. I have three more main chemo treatments to go, so I still could lose much more hair, but I am not planning on that happening."



STEPHEN H. COWLES | THE TIDEWATER NEWS

Chilled by dry ice, the head coverings are intended to constrict blood vessels in the scalp and prevent the chemotherapy from damaging the hair follicles. Barbara is shown with her chemotherapy nurse, Sandy, in the Virginia Oncology Associates' wing at Sentara Obici Hospital in Suffolk. Mary Ann Riddick uses thick gloves to mold the cold cap for her friend.

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