

BREAST CANCER AWARENESS

surviving and thriving



Dr. John D. Bailey

Dedicated to treating breast cancer and saving lives

story by Lisa Kröger photo by James Edward Bates and courtesy of Mary Jo Garrett

Cancer is a scary prospect for most people. Thankfully, advances in science and medicine have made it possible for many patients to not only survive a cancer diagnosis but also to thrive and live healthy lives. John D. Bailey, M.D., of the South Mississippi Breast Center has dedicated his career to fighting breast cancer, becoming one of the most highly reputable breast cancer providers on the Gulf Coast.

Dr. Bailey received his medical degree from the University of Alabama School of Medicine in Birmingham, following undergraduate studies at Rhodes College, where he was honored with a

Cambridge scholarship. He is board certified by the American Board of Surgeons, the American Society of Breast Surgeons in both Stereotactic Breast Procedures and Breast Ultrasound, and the American Board of Medical Examiners. Dr. Bailey's areas of expertise include lumpectomy and mastectomy, advanced laparoscopic and robotic surgery, hernia repair, and thyroid surgery. After joining the South Mississippi Surgeons in 1996, Dr. Bailey has built a career around caring for his patients. He currently serves as the director of the Singing River Hospital Vascular Lab, and the Mississippi Chapter of the American College of Surgeons named him Young Surgeon of the Year in 2000.



HIGH SCHOOL SWEETHEARTS.

ABOVE: Mary Jo Garrett pictured with grandchildren Anna and Kate Garrett. RIGHT: Clayton "Butch" Garrett, Jr.



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Mary Jo Garrett

For many of his patients, Dr. Bailey is more than just a doctor — he’s a source of hope. Moss Point resident Mary Jo Garrett, a patient of Dr. Bailey, received the news that no one wants to hear — twice. In the end of 2013, her husband, Clayton “Butch” Garrett, Jr., was diagnosed with cancer that had metastasized. He underwent chemotherapy and radiation beginning in early 2014. She was his main caregiver, until the roles abruptly reversed when she too was diagnosed with cancer. The same year her husband was fighting for his life, Mary Jo Garrett underwent a routine annual exam, which included a mammogram; still, she never expected to hear that she had breast cancer. In September 2014, she became the one receiving the chemotherapy, following a mastectomy in July.

She credits Dr. Bailey for his support throughout such a difficult time. “Surgeons are not known for bedside manner,” Garrett said. “Dr. Bailey is gentle. When they wheeled me in to my mastectomy, I was trying to make jokes. He walked in as they were beginning to put me to sleep, and he grabbed my hand and held my hand. I will never, ever forget him for holding my hand.”

“It wasn’t easy telling our children that we both had cancer,” she continued. Mary Jo and Butch Garrett were high school sweethearts, married forty-three years with two grown sons, Clay and John, and now two granddaughters, Anna and Kate. Originally from Florida, they traveled with Butch’s career in the Coast Guard until they settled on the Mississippi Gulf Coast.

Throughout her treatment, the couple maintained a sense of humor. “It was our inside joke that we had couple’s chemo,” Garrett said. “We were trying to do it together, and be each other’s caregivers.”

After Mary Jo Garrett’s fourth chemo treatment in November, Butch suffered a fall and was hospitalized. He passed away the day after Thanksgiving 2014.

Today, Mary Jo Garrett is doing well. She is retired and shows no signs of cancer.

Looking back, she credits her strong support system in helping her not only recover but also grieve. “I have a very strong faith, as did my husband,” she said, speaking of her spiritual family at St. Joseph Catholic Church in Moss Point. “My family is strong. Our friends, the doctors, the nurses all stood beside me. My daughter-in-law’s family from Louisiana came and took over, helping with the cooking and cleaning. There’s no way I could’ve done it without all these people.”

The doctors and nursing team were an integral part of that support system.

“Cancer is scary to go through. It’s the unknown,” Garrett explained. “They will walk you every step of the way through it and hold your hand. The team at South Mississippi Breast Center won’t make the decisions for you, but they will give you all the information for you to make the best decision for yourself.”

People are put in your life for a purpose. Dr. Bailey was put in my life for a purpose. I really believe that.”



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