

Gregory said the program is a result of two people getting involved in an awareness program and the county embracing it.

"Without the support of individuals, businesses, doctors and the hospital, this program could not have been such a success. In the last few years, a planning committee was formed. This committee meets to plan our luncheon and shares in the work pulling it all together," she said.

Local doctors approve of the program and support it by purchasing tables at the BATTLE luncheon and fashion show. The first BATTLE luncheon was held six years ago and served 32 guests. Now that number has grown to 325, with only space limiting further growth.

"The first luncheon we had, the idea was to buy a ticket for yourself and one for an underserved person who might not normally have an annual mammogram. The next year, we started selling tables to businesses and individuals. A table seats six people, and sponsoring one table allows six people to eat, receive information on breast cancer prevention and see the fashion show," Gregory said.

The luncheon features a well-known breast cancer-related keynote speaker, often a survivor or relative of a survivor.

Crawford said the first keynote speaker was a young man whose presentation was called "What it's like when your mother has breast cancer."

"There wasn't a dry eye in the room—men and women were crying," she said.

For the fashion revue, breast cancer survivors model clothes from stores in Winston County. As each model walks the runway, an emcee tells how long the model has been a survivor. The program is such a success that other Mississippi counties now hope to start their own BATTLE groups. Crawford credits the program's success to the firm grasp breast cancer has on people's lives.

"Everyone is touched by breast cancer in some fashion because we all have a mother, a grandmother, a sister, a wife—and even our daughters can get this disease," Crawford said.

Though she lost her own sister, Crawford's hope is that awareness will prevent other young women from losing their lives.

"We really believe that when God closes one window, He opens another one somewhere," she said. "If Marsha hadn't died, I wouldn't have gotten involved with BATTLE."

SUMMER BREEZES BRING CROP THREAT



Jim Lytle

It's been a long and winding path, but Asian soybean rust finally reached Mississippi this summer.

Left untreated, the fungal disease can destroy a soybean crop by completely defoliating plants. As its name indicates, the disease first appeared in Asia in 1902 and spread to Australia and then southern Africa on wind currents. Asian soybean rust reached South America in 2001. Brazil has been especially hard hit, with millions of dollars in crop losses in the past four years.

The first spores of the disease in the U.S. were found in Louisiana during November 2004. The first confirmed case of the disease in Mississippi was found July 13, 2005.

Because of the advanced warning that the soybean disease was moving toward the U.S., agronomists and other crop scientists had time to prepare for detecting its presence. Scientists have been scouting kudzu and other wild host plants for the disease.

Sentinel plots also have been used as an early warning system. The small plots of soybeans were planted throughout Mississippi and other producing states ahead of the regular growing season and monitored closely.

MSU Extension soybean specialist Alan Blaine said producers have the right tools, including fungicides, to fight rust. "Rust probably is going to become a part of our lives," he said. "Producers will have to treat for it or plant something else." Blaine also noted differences between the situation in Mississippi and the one in Brazil that will likely reduce the impact of rust in soybeans here.

"We have a winter; they don't," he said. "The cold weather will have a limiting effect on the disease."