

## OPENING DOORS

When Ruth Dugan was asked to become president of the board of trustees of Gilda's Club Northern New Jersey in 2009, the Hackensack-based nonprofit cancer support organization was on the verge of bankruptcy. Today, less than two years later, she is widely credited with saving it from closing its signature red doors forever. She jumped at the chance to bring about change. "There is almost no one, and certainly no family, who has not been touched by cancer," she says.

While spearheading a much-needed makeover of the clubhouse, Dugan righted Gilda's financial ship, rebuilt its board of directors, ramped up its program offerings, and implemented a broad range of new programs designed to increase community awareness and broaden support.

"I function best in chaos," says Dugan, a Saddle River resident and mother of six, explaining the initiatives she has implemented since her tenure began. They include everything from fundraisers like "Ladies of Laughter" to awareness-building programs like "I'll Go If You'll Go," a prostate and breast cancer educational forum. On any given day, Gilda's Club offers a broad range of workshops and support programs to help around 3,000 Bergen County families who are living with cancer.

On a tour of the 8,000-square-foot clubhouse, Dugan proudly shows off the facility's new face. "Our emphasis was on being 'green' and therefore sustainable and healthy," she says, referencing the bamboo cabinetry, natural fiber walls and non-toxic paint she charmed out of willing suppliers, including Benjamin Moore and Armstrong.

Expanding Gilda's reach is next on Dugan's agenda. She is overseeing the development of a satellite facility in Newark. "Gilda's had been designated a federal grant and was about to return the money, because no progress had been made," she explains. In less than six months, she found space in Newark, negotiated a rent payment of \$1 a year and found a partner hospital. "This was important to do. People in the inner city are diagnosed later and have a higher mortality rate. We couldn't let this go," she says, showing off blueprints for a 4,000-square-foot facility now under construction. Incredibly, Dugan still finds time to write passionate editorials in *The Record*, like the one published last fall that took to task the producers of Showtime's *The Big C*. "Cancer is not a laughing matter, but that doesn't mean that we can't work to bring relief and a smile to those who suffer and survive on a day-to-day basis," she says.

## RUTH DUGAN

PRESIDENT, BOARD OF TRUSTEES  
GILDA'S CLUB NORTHERN NEW JERSEY

# (201)

## GIVING BACK

OCTOBER 23, 2010

### GILDA'S CLUB NORTHERN NEW JERSEY

Gilda's Club Northern New Jersey, dedicated to providing an emotional and social support community as an essential complement to medical treatment for cancer patients, hosted a benefit dinner at Nisi in Englewood.

1. James and Elvira Grau
2. Bob and Wendy Federman
3. Barbara Rosenthal, Michele Kolsky-Assatly and Sylvia Golden
4. Frank Huttie, Ruth Dugan, Debbie Aronson, Valerie Vainieri Huttie and Donald Aronson
5. Doug Duchak, Merri Duchak, Norma Wellington Koster and Bernie Koster
6. Roz Ginsburg, Bjorg Ollendorff, June Kane and Angelica Berrie

