

CRAWFORD COUNTY AVALANCHE

Fly fishing program supports cancer victims

by Dan Sanderson-Staff Writer

Laura Schans and Cheryl Kamprath have faced moments of uncertainty dealing with the diagnosis of cancer, but trips to local fly fishing outfitters are for sure in the women's future.

Schans of Grayling, and Kamprath, of Roscommon, are two local women who have attended Reeling and Healing retreats at Gates AuSable Lodge this summer, retreats aimed at supporting women who have been diagnosed with cancer and cancer survivors.

Reeling and Healing Midwest has stepped up its efforts to support women and men dealing with cancer.

Initially established to support women who have dealt with breast cancer, additional retreats have been added to support women affected by other forms of cancer. Reeling and Healing Midwest also sponsors a retreat called Reel Recovery for men who have been diagnosed with cancer or are cancer survivors.

Reeling and Healing provides the opportunity for women and men to get together to learn about fly-fishing, share their stories and enjoy the solitude on the river.

"You can talk freely about your illness, where sometimes when your around family, you can't spill it all," said Schans, who has been treated for lung cancer. "The idea is to be able to try new things and do new things."

Kamprath, who was treated for breast cancer, said she was reluctant to attend the retreat, but was encouraged to go by her husband, Paul.

Kamprath quickly lost her uneasiness by sharing her experiences with other women while learning her new hobby.

"Being a woman and losing your hair - it takes a lot out of you," said Kamprath, who stopped taking chemotherapy medication in June. "Hearing from women that have went through the same experiences was really great and you know you are not the only one dealing with the problem."

Kamprath has been practicing casting with her husband's fly rod, as well as a fly rod given to her by a neighbor in anticipation of purchasing her own fly fishing gear.

"It's something that we look forward to doing together," she said.

Schans, who lives on the East Branch of the AuSable River, also plans to take to the river after she gets her grandchildren back in school and attends follow-up appointments for her cancer treatment.



Cheryl Kamprath of Roscommon, who recently completed treatment for breast cancer, was encouraged by her husband, Paul, to attend the Reeling and Healing retreat at Gates AuSable Lodge. Above, Kamprath practices casting in her yard. (Photo by Dan Sanderson)

"Once everything gets squared away, I am definitely going to be out on the river trout fishing," Schans said.

Reeling and Healing is also holding reunion retreats for women who have attended the program. The first reunion retreat for the 2006 fly-fishing season was held at the Wyandotte Lodge on the Main Branch of the AuSable River.

"This gives them the opportunity to get together, support each other and to fly fish again," said Cathy Sero, the the director for Reeling and Healing Midwest.

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