



Diana “Di” Gawlik poses with her “Go Red for Women” portrait from 2006. Di enjoys sharing her story with others, “because if I can just get one person to take the right steps to save their own lives, I will have made a difference.”

Meet “Di” Gawlik and our new women’s heart health program

Meet Diana Gawlik. She’s petite and beautiful, full of life and warmth. She just radiates healthy enthusiasm. We call her “Di” here at the Health Department. That’s because Di works here as part of our team protecting the health of our community.

I want to tell you about Di because she’s so inspiring and because Di knows well the risks of heart disease that women face. Did you know that heart disease is the No. 1 killer of women in America? That’s why we are working at the Health Department to provide and connect women with the medical screening tests and health care providers they need to reduce their risk—to save their own lives.

But before I tell you about our efforts, let me tell you about our Di. Like most women, Di has spent her life taking good care of others and probably not good enough care of herself. She suffered much heartache in 2005, mourning both the deaths of her parents and her beloved husband of 10 years, Joe, all from heart disease-related causes.

Between her family’s history of heart disease and the stress she was suffering, Di has told me, “I had probably been building up to that heart attack for a year and a half. Di suffered her two heart attacks on Aug. 28, 2005. She flatlined four times in the emergency department, three times on the way to surgery and four more times after a stent was placed in an artery in her heart that was 100 percent blocked. Di’s heart stopped beating for as long as 20 minutes. Her cardiologist gave her family very little hope that she would survive, much less recover.

But recover she did. Di credits her doctors, her stubbornness and her desire to be here for her children and grandchildren. But for this second chance at life, Di feels a responsibility to raise awareness and help other women prevent heart disease so they can live long, healthy lives.

It's for women like Di, the families who love them, and our whole community's health that we've embarked on a new grant-funded program to help women learn of their risk factors for heart disease and make necessary changes to improve their health. This approach to preventing, detecting and controlling heart disease is based on science and evidence of success in similar programs through the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Here's what women who qualify can receive:

- Free screening tests such as blood pressure, blood sugar, cholesterol and BMI—a measure of body fat—all of which can be indicators of heart disease
- Health education and an individualized wellness plan
- Individualized meetings with a Registered Nurse case manager who helps women do self-assessments of eating and lifestyle habits and define goals for improvement
- Referrals to health care providers for medical attention

Generally, women who qualify are ages 40-64, uninsured or underinsured and must meet income guidelines. But please call and discuss your situation with us. You might qualify! The goal is that women will find out where they stand right now in regard to their heart health, and then we will provide information and guidance on how to make key changes related to diet and nutrition, tobacco use and physical activity.

Taking care of yourself is the key to keeping your heart healthy. Just ask Di. She's gone on to represent the Health Department as an ambassador with the American Heart Association's Go Red for Women campaign—she was a key speaker at their luncheon in 2006. Di serves as an inspiration to us here at the Health Department and in our community and a reminder of how very precious our healthy hearts are. Please take the time to protect yours.

For information, visit www.elpasocountyhealth.org or call (719) 578-3111.

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