

# Drag queens stage wig drive for cancer patients

## Benefits women coping with hair loss from treatment

By Julie Chao  
OF THE EXAMINER STAFF

The overlapping interests of cancer patients and drag queens may not be immediately obvious, but the connection is wigs: cancer patients need them and drag queens have them.

So the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence, the most outlandish drag queen group in what may be the drag queen capital of the world,

held a wig drive Sunday to benefit the American Cancer Society.

With three performances in San Francisco, the group collected about 100 wigs for the society's "Look Good, Feel Better" program, which serves several hundred women a year in The City.

The idea came to Sister Phyllis Stein of the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence last year when his mother started treatment for breast cancer, which caused most of her hair to fall out. After hearing she got a wig from the American Cancer Society in her hometown of Syracuse, N.Y., Stein decided to call up the San Francisco chapter to check into its wig situation.

He found out it was in dire need of wigs and has even had to turn people away.

"I thought, wait a minute, this is San Francisco!" said Stein.

And a fund-raiser was born.

At the first wig drive last year, more than \$1,400, 40 wigs and many scarves were donated at a performance that got little publicity. Stein used about \$1,000 of the donations to buy more wigs from a wholesale dealer.

The "Look Good, Feel Better" program offers services, all free, at five locations in San Francisco, including one in Chinese and one in Spanish. It gives women an opportunity not only to select a wig or turban but also to meet a cosmetologist to learn about other changes that may result from cancer, such as skin discoloration or the loss of eyebrows and eyelashes.

To be diagnosed with cancer, then lose your hair on top of that, "it's a loss of control of your sense of self and body," said Agnes Moorehead, who oversees the program.

She said the program was most in need of wigs for women of color and younger women, who prefer longer hair.

Drag performer Patty Mae, dolled up in a black sequin dress and



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**Vicky Marlene performs Sunday at Marlena's during a wig drive for the American Cancer Society program "Look Good, Feel Better," which helps women cope with hair loss due to cancer treatments.**

poofy blond tresses, donated about six wigs Sunday from his supply of about 80.

Of course, not all wig donors were drag queens. One woman came into the first show at Marlena's on Hayes Street, dropped off a garbage bag containing 56 freshly-washed wigs and rushed off back to Marin, looking more than a little stunned at Stein's elaborate makeup, black cocktail dress and flowing nun's habit.

Stein's mother has been cancer-

free for a year and no longer needs a wig, but through hosting the wig drive, he has found that cancer is a disease that touches many people.

"People came to me with their stories of mothers and aunts. Everyone had some sort of tale, and while they were talking to me, they'd stuff all this money into my hands," he said. "In our community, we get caught up with AIDS and HIV and you forget there are other illnesses out there until it comes up and hits you between the eyes."