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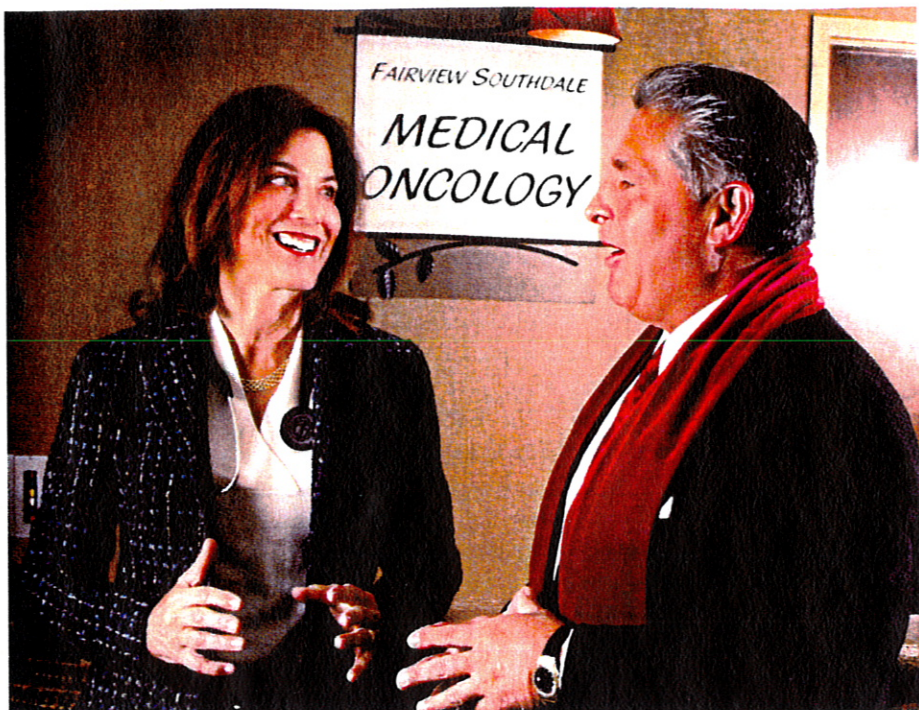
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Doctorpreneur

Barbara Bowers talks about overcoming a modest start, inspiring women to become doctors and even weighs in on the mammogram debate.

BY STEVEN SCHUSSLER

DR. BARBARA BOWERS is the Medical Director of Fairview Southdale's Medical Oncology Center and Breast Center, and a pioneer in her field. Barbara knew that her calling was to become a doctor when they she was only six and, at a time when she wasn't even sure that females could be doctors, she and her sister, Betty, were the first female twins to graduate from the University of Minnesota Medical School. Dr. Bowers is an entrepreneur who is so passionate about her calling that she leads by example and is driven by the mission to truly make a difference in the world.

SS: So how did you become a doctor?

» When I got into the field, only 2 percent of women were practicing physicians, so it seemed very unlikely that I would become a doctor. I grew up on a farm in the small town of Brooks Park, which is near Mora, Minn. My family didn't have indoor plumbing until I was eight, we didn't have a television until I was seven, but we lived in a setting where we read a lot and school work was imperative.

« **Steven Schussler** (steven@schusslercreative.com) is the Founder, Chairman and CEO of Schussler Creative, Inc., which specializes in creating, designing and developing theatrical attractions, restaurants, retail stores and entertainment venues worldwide.

My twin sister and I decided at age six that we were going to be doctors. We didn't know that there was even such a thing as a female doctor, but we looked up to our family physician, Dr. Berge, and he told us we should become doctors. He gave us the interest, shared his passion and enthusiasm, and throughout the years encouraged us to pursue our dream. He died shortly before we got our acceptance into medical school but I think he was up there in heaven pushing for us.

What I do is very rewarding and it's something I'm passionate about. One out of seven or eight women will develop breast cancer in their lifetime. This is not a small number and the outcome can be deadly. When I was approached to set up the Fairview Southdale Breast Center, I said I wouldn't come unless we had state of the art MRI with biopsy capability. I wanted everything to be digital from the MRI to the Ultra Sound, and I wanted all of the team to be dedicated breast radiographers. I wanted to set a standard of excellence for the breast center and the oncology program.

SS: Breast cancer has pulled at the nation's heart strings especially after the debate about mammograms. Talk about that.

» The panel that suggested women wait longer for breast cancer testing didn't have an oncologist. They say they had to have an unbiased panel; that way, the parties that are paying for health care—the government and insurance companies—can then say they are cutting back on some things. If women had to wait until they turned 50 it will be too late if diagnosed to do minor treatments. Instead, very aggressive treatment will be required and will ultimately cost much, much more, in terms of money, care of the patient, loss of work, loss of a parent. We'd lose another 2,000 women a year from breast cancer.

SS: Can you talk about the "big picture" view of your life?

» I was at an event and there was a lady sitting across the table across from me. She said, "You won't know who I am, but you and your sister paved the way so I had the strength to live my dream and finish medical school." It's those types of things—the way that you touch other people's lives to stimulate them to achieve things in their life to make them happy, by pursuing your dream and doing it in a manner where you are enthusiastic for other people to be productive and live their lives. Do something where you affect someone's life positively. Be passionate about what you do and do it well. This leads to happiness. Your enthusiasm and your passion are what get you through. I'm proud that I had the strength to live my dream and finish medical school.

I keep asking myself, "Have I given? Have I given enough towards the blessing I have of being a doctor?" I hope that when I retire, I can retire saying that I gave back what I have been given.