



Cancer survivor, Mrs. Lee Petitgout, teaches students about restraints and small animal care on Oct. 6. Photo by Justice Wehrmeyer.

Lee Petitgout Battles, Beats Skin Cancer

by Makayla Brown

“I needed a nose,” Mrs. Lee Petitgout, the Agriculture teacher at Nation Ford said.

Mrs. Petitgout was diagnosed with Squamous Cell Carcinoma (SCC), the second most common form of skin cancer, in July 2017.

“I was not surprised,” Mrs. Petitgout said. “I just thought it was a patch of dry skin, so I kept putting moisturizer on it. But when it peeled, it wouldn’t heal properly and it would bleed.

So I decided I needed to go to a dermatologist to get it checked out.”

She soon learned she had gotten SCC from sun exposure. Mrs. Petitgout could have easily developed skin cancer in her 20s but instead it built up over the years.

Doctors determined MOS surgery on her nose would be the best treatment for her; the area affected is numbed. “Layer by layer, doctors remove skin and immediately check it for cancer,” Petitgout said. The process repeats

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until they reach a layer that is free of cancer.”

After Mrs. Petitgout endured five rounds of surgery from Sep. 2017 to Feb. 2018, doctors finally found a cancer-free layer of flesh. By this time, Mrs. Petitgout was missing the right side of her nose—her nasal septum and bone could be clearly seen.

The next step is reconstructive surgery. Instead of taking a skin graft and placing it on the affected area, doctors took a square of flesh from Mrs. Petitgout’s forehead and folded it down onto her nose.

“Cancer is like a stopwatch on your life,” Mrs. Petitgout said. Now, she “filters” opportunities that come her way and prioritizes how she spends her time.

“I feel like I’ve been given a chance to be a better teacher, a better person,” she said. “If it had been any worse, I might not have lived to see my daughter get married this year.”

Sun exposure can be beneficial but it can also, evidently, be quite harmful. It can cause heat exhaustion; nausea, excessive sweating, headache, and can lead to heat stroke if left untreated. Heat rash and blisters are just two other ways the sun can negatively impact.

Applying sunscreen is the most common way people seek protection from the sun. Sunscreen may seem like it will protect from the sun quite well, but the products can only protect so much.

The FDA proposed prohibiting sale of sunscreens with higher than SPF 50+ because they can be purposefully misleading. The vitamin A additive in sunscreens could trigger development of lesions or skin tumors.