

By JESSICA CRAWFORD • Daily Leader Oklahoma Panhandle residents frequenting Downing's Market in Beaver, Okla., have become accustomed to walking through the door to the cheerful greeting of Debbie LaRoche. Since the beginning of the year, this is a smiling face they have missed.



Due to an illness she is currently fighting, LaRoche, a single mother, has been unable to work. However, LaRoche has not lost her joy. Why not? Friends and family in a tight-knit community that have rallied around her. "She hasn't been able to work all year," friend and former co-worker Jennifer (Glascock) Rodriguez said. "She was getting really short of breath, and they couldn't figure out what was going on. They finally figured out she had two huge tumors growing from her ovaries up, and they were blocking her airway." LaRoche underwent surgery to remove the tumors only to find another challenge awaited her.

"They took those out, and when they were in there, they discovered she had a spot of cancer," Rodriguez said. "They let her recover from that surgery and Thursday she went in for surgery for that cancer. She is having a total hysterectomy. They also discovered she has breast cancer, but they don't think they will have to do chemo. They are going to try hormone blockers."

Like many women throughout the country, LaRoche has been raising children on her own. When her income was halted, Rodriguez saw the need for a back up plan in the form of a donation account at First Security Bank in Beaver.

"It has been really hard financially because she is a single mother," she said. "She has one son that is still at home, he is a senior in high school. So, that has been a struggle for her. That is why we opened the account.

"My husband and I started it, we are in charge of it," she explained. "She has to ask us for money that way we make sure it is being used for bills or what she may need. It is at First Security Bank and people can make donations there."

Rodriguez and LaRoche have enjoyed a close friendship for several years.

"I worked with her at the store for about six years while I was going through high school and college," she said with a smile. "She is a really sweet lady. I would go help her in the freezer because it was fun to talk to her. I worked with her all the way through this last summer when I got a teaching job."

Being a lifetime resident of Beaver, for the most part, has added the support of family to LaRoche's situation.

“She was born and raised in Beaver,” Rodriguez said. “She has moved off occasionally, but has always come back. Her mom lives Laverne and her daughter lives here in Beaver.”

LaRoche hoped to be home no later than Sunday, Rodriguez said – just in time to watch her son receive his diploma.

“She is hoping to come home either Saturday or Sunday,” she said. “That way she can be here in time for Skylar’s graduation. She is missing her grandson’s second birthday but she said, ‘It is OK, I have many more to celebrate.’ She is so positive.”

Friday, Rodriguez was happy to report LaRoche had come through the surgery with flying colors.

“She came through fine,” she said. “We heard from her today and she is in very little pain. She said they were able to get the cancer when they were in there. So, it sounds like a great report.”

Not only will LaRoche have the ability to enjoy her son’s graduation this month, she will also welcome another grandson into the world.

Rodriguez has been amazed at the strength her friend has exhibited throughout her illness.

“She was really down emotionally until they figured out what was wrong,” Rodriguez said. “Now that she knows, she is really positive. She knows she is going to make it through. She is a lot more positive than you can imagine.”

Anyone wishing to donate to the Debbie LaRoche recovery fund is encouraged to call Jennifer (Glascock) Rodriguez at (580) 470-5906 or mail a donation in care of First Security Bank, P.O. Box 947, Beaver, OK 7393.