

Krista Jones, Woman of the Year 2016



Krista Jones has lived in the Hudson Valley for over 20 years, brought to the area as a radio reporter on WDST and WKNY in Kingston. She later took a position as News Director/ morning show co-host on 92.1 and served in this capacity for over 15 years. After marrying and giving birth to 3 beautiful redheads, the local mom was looking to do something more.

When her friend, a mother of three, was diagnosed with colon cancer in 2012, Krista Jones's immediate response was, "Let me cook them dinner." Night after night, the Hopewell Junction resident left warm, homemade meals on the struggling family's doorstep. Unfortunately, soon after, several more of Jones's friends fell gravely ill. Comforting meals were whipped up for all of them and their families, too. "I grew up with a mother who always had hot food on the table, and I felt that was an important ritual to pass on," she explains.

So committed was she to volunteering, that in 2012, Jones, then working at Clear Channel and as a DJ, launched Sparrow's Nest, a nonprofit 501c3 charity, with a mission to cook and deliver meals to local moms with cancer. It wasn't long before Jones, who ultimately left her broadcasting career to focus on her service initiatives, personally was preparing 40 to 50 trays of food a week in the kitchen of a local Knights of Columbus. "Moms are stubborn, forcing themselves to get out of bed and be superheroes," she says. "This is just a simple idea that can take away the stress over what their kids are eating while they are too sick to cook. I wanted to make a difference." Since Sparrow's Nest took flight, it has grown to an organization that has fed close to one thousand people.

Jones, herself the mother of three, along with staff and a group of volunteers, cook all the meals in a Health Department-approved, 25-by-20-foot kitchen. Her home-cooked dishes are a welcomed need for the families. She uses organic ingredients whenever possible. Every Monday, together with a dedicated team of 10 to 15 drivers, two trays of food are delivered to each recipient within a 30-mile radius of Hopewell Junction. The trays are delivered for as long as the patients' treatment keeps them off their feet, sometimes weeks, sometimes months. Jones wants to make sure that their family has a meal that has already been prepared for them.

In 2015 Camp Sparrow was born. With the children off from school during the summer months, the families who benefit from the weekly deliveries have increased needs to feed their families

throughout the day, not just at dinner time. Throughout the summer, Camp Sparrow delivers cold cuts, bread, snacks and goodies to the families.

Also in 2015, Sparrow's Nest expanded its mission. The charity now includes all legal caregivers of children. Jones knows that cancer is an ugly beast, and the goal is to help as many people as possible, including fathers and other legal guardians who are too sick to shop and make dinner. Cancer patients are struggling to pay medical bills and have other out-of-pocket expenses. As the support in the community grows, the Board of Directors will continue to reassess the needs in our local neighborhoods.

Local business sponsors, individual donors, and the runners who make up Team Sparrow support the program. Created in 2014, Team Sparrow consists of men and women committed to run/walk at race events. In 2015, Team Sparrow was the largest group at the Disney Wine & Dine Race in Orlando, Florida with more than 160 participants who each raised enough funds to feed a family of four for a year.

Krista serves as the Executive Director and sits on many of the board's committees. Krista was chosen as a 2014 Pandora Hearts of Today winner, receiving a 25 thousand dollar check to use for the charity. Sparrow's Nest received the 2014 Organization of the Year Award from the Junior League of Poughkeepsie and the 2015 Headliner Award from the Dutchess County Regional Chamber of Commerce. The organization was also recognized by the Dutchess County Organization of Women as Charity of the Year for 2015.

Sparrow's Nest, with its many programs, thrives with the help of the volunteers, donations, business sponsorships and grants and will continue to take care of the families in the Hudson Valley, "because every caregiver's nest should be protected."