

By Pam King

## Update on Surgeon's Quest to Raise Funds for Cancer Research

*When you've raised \$25 million for the cause of your choice, nobody would mind if you rested on your laurels. With one brilliant idea—a fundraising postage stamp—Dr Balazs “Ernie” Bodai has created an ongoing source of money to support breast cancer research at centers throughout the country.*

*“I’m always looking for another project,” said Bodai, 49, a breast cancer surgeon at Kaiser’s Sacramento facility. “I’ve got ADHD [attention deficit hyperactivity disorder] really bad. I can never relax.”*

### From Stamps to License Plates

Dr Bodai is channeling his positive energy into an idea for specialty license plates in California, where motorists register 28 million vehicles per year.<sup>1</sup> A former California Assemblyman asked Bodai to help with the project, which will raise money for uninsured women diagnosed with breast cancer. The license plate would contain the same image from the postage stamp: the goddess Diana, huntress and patroness of women in childbirth, reaching behind her head to pull an arrow from her quiver.

Cure Breast Cancer Inc, Bodai’s nonprofit organization, must collect 7500 paid applications for the license plates by the end of 2001 before the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) will authorize them. In early Spring 2001, Bodai

was beginning to organize events to publicize the license plates. Kaiser Permanente was planning to place promotional materials about the license plates in all of its California facilities and to mention the project in its newsletters. Of each \$50 license plate fee collected, about \$34 would be contributed to the breast cancer treatment fund for low-income women, a fund administered by the State of California Department of Health Services.

“This is a very difficult task,” Bodai said. “There are so many specialty plates. But once you sell your 7500, you’ve got it made. The DMV sends out about 28 million license renewals every year with a brochure advertising each of the plates.”

Bodai says he paid the \$150,000 start-up costs for the breast cancer

stamp out of his own pocket but that he doesn’t have that kind of money to spare for the license plates. Fortunately, though, he now has a well-developed network of contacts in breast cancer support groups and in women’s groups—two communities likely to show substantial natural enthusiasm for the project.

“A lot of people have been suspicious of my motives, but I think it has to be because they’re jealous,” Bodai said. “I have gained nothing from this. Every cent has gone to the cause. Do you have any idea how cutthroat the world of fundraising is?”

Meanwhile, Bodai has been battling his own medical problem—the diagnosis of prostate cancer last June. He received brachytherapy (a radioactive implant), and his prostate serum antigen (PSA) level has dropped from 20 to 1—a very positive sign.

### One Cause Helping Another: A Plan to Stamp Out Prostate Cancer

Not surprisingly, Bodai’s experience with prostate cancer has spawned yet another awareness project. He has both created and obtained trademark protection for a slogan—“Screen Together, Live Together”—and for a logo that incorporates the images of two first-class postage stamps: the breast cancer stamp and a 33¢ prostate cancer stamp. His idea is twofold: to encourage women to come in for annual mammograms and to bring along their husbands or boyfriends to have their PSA levels checked. Bodai’s cancer was discovered through routine PSA examination.

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PAM KING is a freelance writer based in the San Francisco Bay Area. She has been a staff writer for the Los Angeles Herald Examiner, the San Francisco Chronicle and the Contra Costa Times, and regularly writes profiles for Diablo magazine. She and her husband, TPMG physician Albert Palitz, have three children.



“Contrary to what some people say, the PSA test is very accurate,” he said. “There’s a zone, between readings of 4 and 10, in which it’s not clear whether there’s infection or cancer, but another test (the free PSA test) answers that question. It’s actually even better than mammography for detecting cancer.”

In the wake of success of the 2-1/2-year-old breast cancer stamp—(whose sales of \$300 million rank second only to sales of the Elvis Presley stamp, which has been for sale for more than a decade), the US Postal Service has authorized issuance of five more such “semipostal” stamps. By definition, semipostal stamps sell for a maximum of 25% more than their face value, with the excess money going to a designated cause. Bodai would like to see

prostate cancer research (and awareness of the condition, its detection, and its treatment) as one of the beneficiaries, and he dreams of seeing his “Screen Together, Live Together” slogan on a stamp. The numbers of new cases of breast cancer and prostate cancer diagnosed annually are comparable,<sup>2</sup> as are the survival rates—patients whose diseases are detected early.<sup>3</sup>

“What happened with the breast cancer stamp exceeded my wildest expectations,” Bodai said. “The way I figure it, if you consider each person who bought them, each person who delivered them, and each person who received them, 900 million eyes have seen those stamps!”

To order breast cancer stamps or for more information on Dr

Bodai’s activities, visit his Web site ([www.curebreastcancer.org](http://www.curebreastcancer.org)). For information or to place an order for a California breast cancer license plate, call toll-free 1-877-834-HOPE (4673). ❖

#### References

1. California statistical abstract, 2000. 41st ed. [Sacramento, CA]: Dept of Finance; [2000]. Table J-4, p 156-7.
2. United States National Center for Health Statistics. Health, United States, 2000: with Adolescent health chartbook. Hyattsville, MD: National Center for Health Statistics; 2000. Table 55, p 226-7.
3. United States National Center for Health Statistics. Health, United States, 2000: with Adolescent health chartbook. Hyattsville, MD: National Center for Health Statistics; 2000. Table 56, p 228.

## Our Deeds

Our deeds determine us as much as we determine our deeds.

*George Eliot, née Mary Anne Evans, 1818-1880, 19th century English author*