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HEALTH

360

Nutritionist and wellness expert Brooke Thomas inspires residents to turn their lives around—one meal at a time.

by *DEB MITCHELL*

When Brooke Thomas, owner of 360 Your Life, a wellness consultancy in Charlotte and Lake Norman, and nutrition consultant for Trump National Golf Club in Mooresville, was diagnosed with stage 3 melanoma during her first trimester of her first pregnancy, she had no idea it would change her life for the better.

“They told me I could have chemotherapy and possibly lose the baby, cut the cancer out without anesthesia, or do nothing and hope for the best,” says Thomas.

She ended up with 50 stitches and a beautiful, healthy baby girl, but the experience caused her to rethink her concept of health.

“I thought I was healthy because everything I ate was sugar free and fat free,” she says, “but my brother [Dr. Matthew McAlees, a Charlotte-based chiropractor and wellness expert] told me I was eating chemicals and ‘fake’ food.”





“I felt like that was so extreme,” she says, but in the end, Thomas, who already held a business degree, went back to school to become a certified nutritionist.

“I got so excited to help people out there who were just like me,” she says. After working with clients one-on-one for a time, she decided to change her business model to reach more people by holding speaking engagements for employees at area corporations.

At one such event, an audience member asked Thomas what she could possibly know about being sick and in pain. “That’s when I realized I had to be vulnerable myself if I wanted anyone to listen to me.”

Now Thomas shows ‘before’ pictures of her own yo-yo weight loss and gain, brittle hair and nails, and lack of energy. She shares her story of cancer survival and quite



literally kicks off her shoes, letting her warm, bubbly personality shine through. "I let people into my heart because I want them to know I really care," she says.

Event attendees line up to share their success stories with Thomas: They've lost weight they'd never been able to lose; they no longer have the afternoon energy 'crash'; ailments like rheumatoid arthritis have gone into remission—all by implementing Thomas' methods of accessible (yet substantial) changes like reading labels to find hidden sugars and chemicals and replacing processed foods by cooking with organic, whole-food alternatives.

"The funny thing is that me in the kitchen is hilarious," she says. "I always share with people that if I can do it, literally anybody can!"

One of Thomas' biggest calls to action is to support local food producers. "What people need to understand is that if we as a community want to have access to the foods our bodies need at affordable price points, we have to start supporting local producers."

To date, Thomas has hosted sold-out wellness events and revamped the menu at Trump National; she's launched a healthy lunch initiative at Davidson Day School, counts Lowes and Belk among her clientele, and has five books under her belt, including three cookbooks. All of her programs are based on four pillars: nutrition, home, beauty, and stress, challenging clients to learn what isn't healthy and to find healthy 'swaps' for them—but to do so slowly over time, implementing one change a day so it's less overwhelming.

"I always say that these changes are uncomfortable," she says, "You have to have a better reason than just fitting into a pair of jeans. It has to be a 'why' that makes you cry or it won't work!"

Thomas' 'why' is the very people whose lives she touches at her events and her own daughters, Reagan, now 10, and Riley, 7. "It comes down to what kind of home you want to create," says Thomas. "I want a healthy home and I want to make it easier for my daughters to create healthy homes of their own when they grow up." **LNM**

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