

CONNECTIONS

THE NEWSLETTER OF BREAST CANCER CONNECTIONS

Your Community Resource for Information & Support

Breast Density Basics: All you need to know about breast density



By Jessie Jacob, M.D.,
Director of Ultrasound at
Northern California
Women's Imaging Center,
Vice President of Medical
Affairs at U-Systems-GE

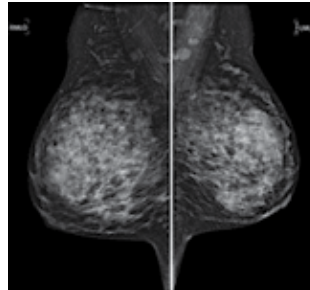
**It's in the media, your
mammography report
mentions it, and now
there is even a law
about it. Everyone's**

talking about it, but what is dense breast tissue and why does it matter?

Breast tissue consists of fatty and fibroglandular tissue. Dense breast tissue is defined as having a higher percentage of fibroglandular tissue within your breasts. If more than 50 percent of your breast is made of fibroglandular tissue, then your breasts are classified as "dense." The sensitivity of mammography is significantly diminished in women with dense breast tissue.¹ Additionally, women with dense breast tissue have a four-to-six times higher risk of developing breast cancer than women with minimal fibroglandular tissue in their breasts.²

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Full field digital mammography:
BI- RAD 4 dense breasts



Full field digital mammography:
BI- RAD 1 fatty breast

Snowballs and polar bears in California?

You may have heard the statement that looking for cancer in dense breast tissue is like looking for a polar bear (or snowball) in a snowstorm. This is a descriptive way of explaining why dense breast tissue can potentially mask breast cancers. On a mammogram, both dense breast tissue and cancers show up as white. Therefore with mammography, a cancer can easily hide in a background of dense breast tissue since they both appear white. Alternatively, in fatty tissue, which is gray, a white mass (cancer) can be readily identified.

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Go green and help us save money.

**Contact
news@bccconnections.org
to receive this newsletter
by email.**

Breast Cancer Connections

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www.bccconnections.org

Hours: Monday through Friday, 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.
Weekly Q&A Session: Thursdays, 5:30 to 7:00 p.m.

The mission of Breast Cancer Connections is to support people touched by breast cancer by providing comprehensive, personalized services in an atmosphere of warmth and compassion.

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Connections is a free publication of Breast Cancer Connections. It is a forum for the exchange of information and ideas concerning breast cancer and breast health. The views expressed by individual contributors do not necessarily reflect those of BCC as an organization. If you have questions about how any information in the newsletter relates to your personal health care, we urge you to consult with your doctor. Our resources are designed to help you develop questions for your health care provider, not for diagnosis or treatment purposes. Since we compile information from a variety of sources, we also cannot make any guarantee that it is accurate or up to date.

From the Executive Director

Dear Friends,

June marks the end of our fiscal year, and looking back over the last twelve months we have so much to be proud of at BCC. Together we supported over 2,500 people through our personalized programs and services, and provided critical early detection to over 750 women and men who otherwise would not have had access to care.



In November, we hosted our 9th Annual Breast Cancer Conference: *Sharing Knowledge~Creating Hope*, which brought together more than 350 attendees, including breast cancer patients and survivors, medical professionals, therapists, and health educators—all united in the fight against breast cancer.

Our Spring Benefit, featuring *The New York Times* bestselling author Cheryl Strayed, once again sold out. At the event, Liz Kniss and Brandi McWade's personal stories reminded us how we support each other in our time of greatest need, and Cheryl Strayed inspired us to keep walking even when it seems impossible to stand. We were grateful to have not one, but two \$20,000 challenge grants in honor of our 20th Anniversary. Please see page 8 for more information on the many people and partners who gave generously to make this event our most successful to date.

We were then honored with the Palo Alto Chamber of Commerce 2013 Tall Tree Award for *Outstanding Nonprofit*. We are so thrilled and touched by this award. We want to thank all the members of our community who nominated us, and all of you for your contributions to making BCC the outstanding community resource it is today. Please see the article on page 6.

Since BCC was founded in 1993, we have served over 20,000 people, ensuring that no one has had to face breast cancer alone. In honor of our 20th Anniversary, BCC plans to expand our services to help ovarian cancer patients, while still maintaining our high level of personalized support to our breast cancer clients. In celebration, we are hosting a 20th Anniversary Gala called *Fit for Life: A Night in the Med* on September 21 and hope you will join us. For more details, please see page 7.

Finally, we would like to express our deepest appreciation to Marta Nichols, who will be leaving her position as BCC Board Member this summer. Marta served two terms on the Board, in addition to volunteering as a Buddy to help BCC clients in need. We are deeply grateful for the time, energy, and leadership she has brought to BCC these past six years and look forward to our continued relationship.

On behalf of our Board and staff, I wish you a wonderful summer!

A handwritten signature in dark ink, which appears to be "Karen".

Continued from page 1

My breasts don't feel dense so I must not have dense breast tissue, right?

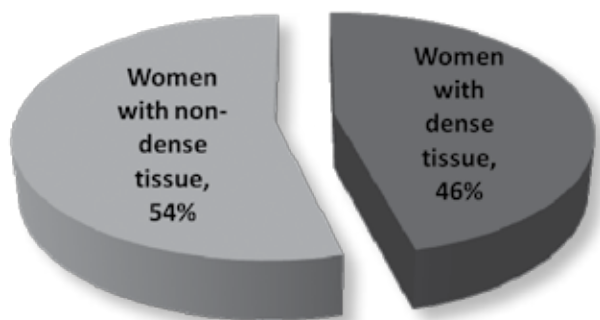
Breast density cannot be determined by palpation or by the appearance of the breasts on exam—it can only be determined by evaluating a mammogram. Your radiologist performs your breast density assessment at the time of your mammographic interpretation.

Isn't dense breast tissue only a problem for young women?

Generally speaking, it is true that younger women usually have denser breast tissue and most women will have replacement of dense glandular breast tissue as they age. However, that being said, 74 percent of women in their 40s, 57 percent of women in their 50s, 44 percent of women in their 60s and 36 percent of women in their 70s have dense breast tissue.³

Does this mean that something is wrong with me?

NO, having dense breast tissue is **not an abnormal** condition. It is a feature of your body. 46 percent of women in the United States have dense breast tissue.⁴



Am I the last person in the world to learn about the importance of breast density? How do I find out if I have dense breast tissue?

In 2010, a Harris Interactive poll demonstrated that 95 percent of women were not aware of their breast density. Maintaining breast health begins with awareness.

Due to the need for greater awareness of dense breast tissue and the limitations of mammography, six states, including California, have enacted legislation requiring radiologists to directly inform patients if they have dense breast tissue. If you have dense breasts, your patient letter conveying your mammographic results will now inform you about the limitations of mammography and the potential need for additional supplemental imaging.

Since my mammogram report is negative, am I imagining that lump in my breast?

Given the limitations of mammography in dense breast tissue, you should be aware of your density, as well as changes in your breasts, and promptly communicate concerns about your breast health to your physician **even if your mammogram is negative**.

What about digital mammography? I've heard that it is better for dense breast tissue.

Digital mammography has been found to be more effective for pre- and perimenopausal women with dense breast tissue. However, even digital mammography has significant limitations in dense breast tissue.⁴

Yay! Does this mean that I'm done with mammography?

Mammography is still the gold standard. Supplemental imaging is meant to complement mammography, not replace it. If your doctor recommends a breast ultrasound exam, it should not be performed in isolation. However, a woman with dense breast tissue may not require ongoing supplemental imaging if her breast density changes and becomes more fatty.

Why hasn't anyone ever told me about my breast density?

Since the 1970's, breast density was found to mask cancers and limit the sensitivity of mammography. Although there was a general sense of awareness in the medical community,

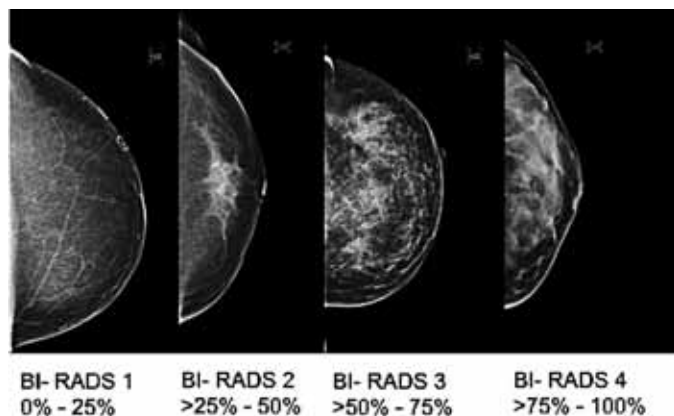
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a clear solution was not identified. Over time, more evidence has surfaced demonstrating the reduction in mammographic sensitivity and elevated risk for women with dense breast tissue. A number of studies have also shown the benefit of supplemental imaging with modalities such as ultrasound.

What's my number? Sounds like a pick-up line.

A breast density composition (or BI-RADS) scoring system to categorize breast density was developed by the American College of Radiology to communicate the limitations of mammography in women with dense breast tissue. This number or its corresponding language is incorporated into each mammographic report sent to the ordering physician. The BI-RADS density scoring system ranges from 1 to 4 with BI-RADS density composition scores of 3 and 4 classified as dense.



I get it, breast density is important, but since I have already had breast cancer, it doesn't really affect me.

Having dense breast tissue significantly elevates the risk of developing a recurrence following a lumpectomy for invasive breast cancer or DCIS.⁵

I have been told that I have dense breast tissue – now what?

Studies have shown that certain supplemental imaging exams, such as breast ultrasound, improve the sensitivity of detecting cancer when used as an adjunct to mammography.

Cancers detected with breast ultrasound are predominantly small, invasive, and node negative.⁶ For women at high risk of developing breast cancer, the American Cancer Society recommends screening breast MRI in conjunction with mammography. As always, the need for additional supplemental screening should be discussed with your physician. Your physician will assess your risk and recommend the appropriate management. It should be noted that performing an additional screening test might result in identifying noncancerous findings, which may require further workup.

How can I stop having dense breast tissue?

Dense breast tissue is just a physical attribute like other features of your body. It is not something that you can actively try to change or improve. The best thing to do is to be proactive, participate in your breast health and understand your risk factors. Lastly, continue to practice a healthy lifestyle by exercising, maintaining a healthy weight, and limiting alcohol consumption. [⌘](#)

1. Mandelson et al. Breast density as a predictor of mammographic detection: comparison of interval- and screen-detected cancers. *J Natl Cancer Inst* 2000; 92:1081-1087
 2. Boyd NF et al. Mammographic Density and the Risk and Detection of Breast Cancer. *NEJM* 2007;356:227-36.
 3. Checka CM, Chun JE, Schnabel FR, Lee J, Toth H. The relationship of mammographic density and age: implications for breast cancer screening. *AJR Am J Roentgenol*. 2012 Mar;198(3):W292-5.
 4. Pisano ED, Gastonis C, Hendrick E et al. Diagnostic Performance of Digital versus Film Mammography for Breast – Cancer Screening. *NEJM* 2005;353:1773.
 5. Cil, Fishell, Hanna et al. Mammographic Density and the Risk of Breast Cancer Recurrence After Breast Conserving Surgery. 2009;115:5780.
 6. Berg WA, Blume JD, Cormack JB, Mendelson EB, Lehrer D, Böhm-Vélez M, Pisano ED, Jong RA, Evans WP, Morton MJ, Mahoney MC, Larsen LH, Barr RG, Farria DM, Marques HS, Boparai K; ACRIN 6666 Investigators. Combined screening with ultrasound and mammography vs mammography alone in women at elevated risk of breast cancer. *JAMA*. 2008 May 14;299(18):2151-63. Erratum in: *JAMA*. 2010 Apr 21;303(15):1482.
- This article was reviewed by: Erika Bell, Ph.D., Manager of Medical Information Services and Miriam Green, Patient Advocate Reviewer, BCC Survivorship and Advocacy Program.

BCC Through the Years...



Celebrating BCC's 10th anniversary



BCC receives its first computer!



Grateful for our stars



Mailing party hard at work spreading word about BCC



Meeting in our new home



We love to party!

It's Volunteer Recognition Thyme!

13th Annual Susan B. Campbell Volunteer Recognition Event



Wednesday, June 12, 2013




Breast Cancer Connections Receives *Outstanding Nonprofit* Tall Tree Award

Breast Cancer Connections was recently selected by the Palo Alto Chamber of Commerce and the Palo Alto Weekly as the "Outstanding Nonprofit" at the 34th Annual Tall Tree Awards.

The Tall Tree Awards, presented each April to an outstanding citizen volunteer, business, professional business person, and nonprofit, recognize exceptional civic contributions and service to the community. Honorees are

selected based on their local impact, breadth of contribution, diversity of individuals impacted, timeliness, and originality of contribution. Tall Tree Award recipients were honored at a dinner on Wednesday, April 10, at the Crowne Plaza Cabaña Hotel.

"We are honored by the outpouring of support we received leading up to this award," said Karen Nelson, Breast Cancer Connections' Executive Director. "Many of our clients, volunteers, and board members wrote letters praising the organization's dedication, and I'm proud to say that we continue to fulfill our founders' dream of supporting those touched by breast cancer

as we approach our 20th anniversary. It's extremely rewarding to have our commitment to the local community acknowledged." 



Two New Support Groups

Couples Support Group

Mondays

6:30 to 8:00 p.m. Register (650) 326-6686

Couples invited to the full six-week series. Cancer patients and their partners commonly experience stress and uncertainty. This mind-body program will assist couples facing challenges associated with cancer, will significantly decrease stress, and will improve couples' wellbeing. Led by Penny Donnelly, R.N., LMFT & Lee Kravetz, M.A., LMFT.

Caregivers Support Group

Second Tuesday

6:30 to 8:00 p.m. Register (650) 326-6686

This group is for caregivers to discuss the challenges of being in a caregiver role, and to gain support from other caregivers. There will be an emphasis on self-care in order to be an effective caregiver. Topics will vary depending on the challenges of the current group members. Led by Joshua Maddox, Ph.D.

Volunteers Needed!

Get involved by applying your skills at BCC. We're happy to work around your schedule. Time commitments are flexible for the following positions. Learn more about other opportunities and apply at www.bcconnections.org/volunteer or contact Joan Venticinque, Manager of Volunteer Resources at joan@bcconnections.org, (650) 326-6299 ext. 16.

Wig Assistance

Volunteer your organizing and styling skills. Help us maintain our supply of wigs, scarves, and hats, and assist clients in selecting a head covering.

Social Media

Help us grow BCC's online community. Work with our Marketing Manager on creating and collecting content for Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, and more.

Data Entry

Work with Program or Development staff on various projects to keep our records up to date. Database knowledge not necessary.

BCC welcomes Natalie Morales, new Development Officer

Natalie has a diverse background in nonprofit fundraising, specializing in corporate development. In her previous roles, Natalie built several outstanding relationships with some of Silicon Valley's top philanthropic and corporate leaders. In addition, she helped drive the development and implementation of fundraising strategies for The Leukemia & Lymphoma Society and CouponsforChange.org. [🔗](#)



Mira Geffner joins staff as the new Program Assistant for Medical Information Services



Mira has worked with patient education and advocacy non-profits for several years. In her role at the American Porphyria Foundation, she conducted outreach to physicians at medical conferences, educated newly diagnosed patients on rare genetic disorders, and managed the organization's news-

letter and website. Mira is a part-time student at San Jose State University, working toward a Master's in Library & Information Science. [🔗](#)

BREAST CANCER
20
YEARS
CONNECTIONS

20TH ANNIVERSARY
CELEBRATION

FIT FOR LIFE
A NIGHT IN THE MED
featuring a taste of Greece, Italy, and Spain
SATURDAY 9.21.13

5th Annual Spring Benefit with Author Cheryl Strayed

On Wednesday, March 6, 2013, Breast Cancer Connections hosted its 5th Annual Spring Benefit at Sharon Heights Golf & Country Club in Menlo Park. Over 325 guests attended the breakfast to celebrate the journeys we all take throughout our lives.



Beth Solomon-Casper, Trang Le, Baird Lloyd, Carol Schultz, and Judith Cornez

BCC's Executive Director, Karen Nelson, welcomed everyone to the event and introduced Palo Alto City Councilwoman, Liz Kniss, who courageously shared the journey of her personal and private breast cancer diagnosis. Councilwoman Kniss reminded the audience of the importance of mammograms and other screenings and how BCC's Gabriella Patser Program provides these necessary screenings to young women and men who are not otherwise able to afford them.



Karen Nelson and Cheryl Strayed



Rina Bello and Brandi McWade

Brandi McWade, a BCC client, eloquently described how the then 27-year-old used the free services BCC's Gabriella Patser Program provided. She not only received early detection services which led to her breast cancer diagnosis, but was treated with the warmth and compassion she needed during her own individual journey.



Cheryl Strayed signs books for guests

Cheryl Strayed is the author of the #1 *New York Times* bestselling memoir, *Wild*, as well as *The New York Times* bestseller *Tiny Beautiful Things* and the critically acclaimed novel *Torch*. In her memoir *Wild*, Cheryl writes about carrying a tremendous physical and emotional weight over many miles of rugged terrain on the Pacific Crest Trail. The morning of the Spring Benefit, she shared heartfelt personal stories about what she learned on her journey about bearing the unbearable, moving from grief to anger to acceptance, and walking even when it seems impossible to stand.



Jill Freidenrich, Karen Nierenberg, Liz Kniss, Fran Codispoti, and Karen Nelson

As the most successful Spring Benefit fundraiser to date, **BCC raised more than \$225,000**, thanks to ticket sales, community sponsors (see box), Challenge Grants, and the generosity of guests. Every donation collected that morning was matched by the Morgan Family Challenge Grant and the Brown Family Foundation, doubling the impact of each dollar received.



Dr. Jessie Jacobs and Dr. Diana Guthaner



Jill Freidenrich and Linda Williams

Our heartfelt thanks to Cheryl, Liz, and Brandi for their openness, humor, and honesty, and to all the volunteers who helped to plan and execute the event. Special thanks to BCC's event committee: Co-Chairs Mayla Clark and Nancy McGaraghan; Fran Codispoti, Margaret Day, Jill Freidenrich, Judy Marcus, Karen Nierenberg, Paula Powar, Marcia Rehmus, Margaret Weil; and to BCC Marketing and Development staff, Jill Nelson and Kelly Spaulding, for all their hard work to make this event a wonderful success! 

Photos by Diane Quenell

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10th Annual Breast Cancer Conference

*Sharing Knowledge—
Creating Hope*

**Saturday, November 2, 2013
8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.**

**Oracle Conference Center
350 Oracle Parkway, Redwood Shores**

**Online registration begins September 18
at www.bcconnections.org**

Our annual medical symposium provides a full day of breast cancer education, resources, networking, and camaraderie. This event is open to the public, and is designed for those touched by breast cancer. Continuing education units available.

Topics this year include lymphedema, the breast density law, setting expectations for rehabilitation, integrative medicine, fear of recurrence and nutrition, and much more. Stay tuned at www.bcconnections.org for more details.

Is your company interested in becoming a corporate sponsor for our 2013 conference?

For sponsorship inquiries, please contact Trang Le, Program Associate, at trang@bcconnections.org or (650) 326-6299, ext. 11.



Photos by Diane Quenell from 2012 conference

Clip-out Calendar of Programs & Events

Helpline

A team of dedicated volunteers is available to listen and connect clients to helpful resources. Monday through Friday from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

Weekly Q&A Session

Every Thursday from 5:30 to 7:00 p.m., a physician or medical professional from various breast cancer specialties is available to address medical questions and concerns. This is a facilitated session, and staff/volunteers are available to help connect clients with additional resources. *Due to time constraints, our medical professional will close the session if clients have not arrived within the first 15 minutes.*

Buddy Program

Volunteer survivors are matched with clients according to diagnosis or topic of choice to provide support and share experiences.

Comfort Totes

Available for those newly diagnosed with breast cancer or with a breast cancer recurrence. If you know someone who would benefit from a Comfort Tote, please call the Helpline at (650) 326-6686.

Therapist

A team of qualified therapists with experience helping women with breast cancer offers one or two sessions at no cost.

Megan Lynch Memorial Library

A comprehensive breast cancer library with internet access. Open Monday through Friday from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

Personalized Research/Breast Health Educator

Our medical information service team can assist by providing personalized research and explaining medical information—from medical journal articles to a pathology report, and more.

Personalized Decision Making Guide

A trained volunteer or staff member will work with you using this guide which is intended to help you clarify and explore a practical, emotional, or breast cancer treatment decision.

Ongoing Programs

All BCC programs and services are free. Space is limited; please RSVP at (650) 326-6686.

Unless otherwise indicated, all programs and events take place at Breast Cancer Connections, 390 Cambridge Avenue, Palo Alto.

MONDAY

Metastatic Support Group

Mondays 6:30 to 8:30 p.m.

New! Couples Support Group

Mondays 6:30 to 8:00 p.m.
6-week series

TUESDAY

DCIS Support Group in Los Altos

Second and fourth Tuesdays
12:00 to 1:30 p.m.
919 Fremont Avenue, Los Altos

Mindfulness Meditation

First Tuesday, 6:00 to 7:00 p.m.

Young Women's Breast Cancer Group

First and third Tuesdays
7:00 to 9:00 p.m.

New! Caregivers Support Group

Second Tuesdays, 6:30 to 8:00 p.m.

WEDNESDAY

Healing and Guided Imagery

First and third Wednesdays
5:30 to 7:00 p.m.

Young Survivors Living Well Group

First Wednesday
(Group will change meeting time to the second Wednesday starting July 10)
7:30 to 9:30 p.m.

Creating Connections

Fourth Wednesday, 5:00 to 7:00 p.m.
Topics vary each month

THURSDAY

Weekly Q&A Session

Thursdays, 5:30 to 7:00 p.m.
Call or visit our website for the schedule of medical professionals

Recovery & Renewal Support Group

Second Thursday
7:30 to 9:00 p.m.

FRIDAY

Healthy Steps—exercise class

Fridays, 8:30 to 9:30 a.m.

Tai Chi

Fridays, 9:45 to 10:45 a.m.

Pilates Matwork for Breast Cancer Rehabilitation

Fridays, 12:00 to 12:45 p.m.

Healing Touch

Third Fridays starting July 19
6:00 to 8:00 p.m. (1-hour appointment)

SATURDAY

Recovery & Renewal Support Group

Third Saturday
1:00 to 2:30 p.m.

Group Life Coaching

Second Saturday, 1:00 to 2:00 p.m.

Individual Life Coaching

Second Saturday
2:00 to 4:00 p.m. (30-minute appt.)

Newly Diagnosed & In-Treatment Support Group

Saturdays, 3:00 to 4:30 p.m.

Triple-Negative Breast Cancer Support Group

Third Saturday
11:00 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.

SUNDAY

Reiki Energy Healing Sessions

Second Sunday
11:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. (30-min. appt.)



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GO GREEN
with the e-newsletter!
email news@bccconnections.org

New Programs

Mad Hatter's Tea
Saturday, August 24, 2013
10 a.m. to 1 p.m.
Limited Seating.
Register (650) 326-6686.

Create a new look and find your style! Learn about different headwear options suited for those with hair loss from treatment. Marita Trobough from The Next Step, a boutique just for women facing breast cancer, will display a variety of headwear and share tips on wear and care. Bring a hat and scarf, or select one from the BCC Boutique free of charge.

[facebook.com/breastcancerconnections](https://www.facebook.com/breastcancerconnections)



**7th Annual Discovering
Complementary Therapies Day**
Saturday, June 29
8:30 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.
Register (650) 326-6686

Our 7th annual event intends to inform, inspire, and connect those touched by breast cancer to different therapies that complement treatment and support overall wellbeing. This year's topics include home organization, reducing toxic exposure in your home, aromatherapy, and more. Stay tuned at www.bccconnections.org for full event details. Reserve your spot today! Register early (650) 326-6686. Friends and family welcome.

[@bc_connections](https://twitter.com/bc_connections)

