

Schilling makes pitch for sun safety

By Jessica Hackett

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EASTON -

After Shonda Schilling's doctor told her she had melanoma, she said she walked out of the office and still wanted to tan.

Schilling, wife of Red Sox pitcher Curt Schilling, told Stonehill College students Tuesday, April 1, she did not understand the seriousness of her skin cancer, but after four surgeries and a number of permanent scars across her back, she realized she was lucky to be alive.

She said when filling out paperwork at the doctor's office, she described herself as having olive skin because she tanned so much she forgot she was really fair skinned.

Schilling told students being tan was an important part of her life and even worked at night during the summer so she would not miss a minute in the sun.

"I had my own idea of what beauty was," Schilling said.

Schilling told the Stonehill students they were probably already trained on what they believe being attractive is, and said she would not lecture them about not going tanning, but said it is important to get your skin checked and use sun protection. She said she believed she looked beautiful with a tan, but now when she looks at pictures of herself without a tan she can't believe she thought she looked good since it was not natural looking with her hair and eye color.

"We are all made different for a reason," Schilling said. "I can not even believe I thought that looked better."

She said many people around her did not consider melanoma to be "real" cancer. Schilling said it was not until she did an interview on ESPN where they aired pictures of her back that people began realizing the seriousness of her cancer.

Schilling said the leading deadly cancer in women 20 to 30 years old is skin cancer and one in five children will be diagnosed with the disease.

"Nobody thought it was real cancer," Schilling said.

She said every time she went to the doctor to get a mole removed, they would find another one that needed to be taken off. Melanoma can get into the blood stream and spread to major organs in the human body, Schilling said.

Stonehill student Amanda Santeuci said she was interviewing Schilling, who lives in the same town as Santeuci, for a leadership paper she was working on and they began talking about skin cancer.

"I told her a lot of people at Stonehill tan so I told her it would be great if she could come and talk about skin cancer, so she did," Santeuci said.

Santeuci said some students even say they are "probably going to die from some sort of cancer so they tan anyway."

"People at the school don't really know what skin cancer is," Santeuci said. "I think more colleges in general need to have more education on skin cancer."

In 2002, Schilling started the SHADE foundation, which was formed to educate children and the community on melanoma, how to prevent and detect it and to promote of sun safety.

Schilling said she got the name after she and her family moved to Arizona and she asked the school to put a shade over the playground, as they were out at recess in 115-degree weather.

She said when she and her family go to places like Disney World, they go after 2 p.m. and said going later in the afternoon has its perks in Disney World when the lines are much shorter.

When she trains for the Boston Marathon or the Pan Mass Challenge, she said she runs or bikes in the morning before the sun is strong.

Schilling said Red Sox second baseman Dustin Pedroia's wife had lymph nodes removed from her thigh after she was diagnosed with skin cancer at age 18. She also said former Red Sox players Derek Lowe and Mark Loretta are also skin cancer survivors.

"It's something that's becoming an epidemic. The O-Zone layer is depleted and we can not fight what we've done to mother nature," Schilling said.

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