After her husband died in 2011 at age 43 of colon cancer, Dr. Melinda Conklin wrote that she had a “choice to stay paralyzed with grief and fear or to use the pain and darkness to transform.”

She chose the latter, starting a nonprofit organization called Hitting Cancer Below the Belt. Conklin, called Mindy by friends, was inspired by words her husband had written in a letter: “I hope God’s plan allows us the chance to help others. If not together, I know you will.”

Richard Conklin died 16 months after being diagnosed with stage 4 colorectal cancer.

Hitting Cancer Below the Belt is raising money to do outreach and education but also to support the costs of colon cancer screening for people who are uninsured. Conklin said proceeds from a golf tournament and a 5K run were going to be identified this year. But the incidence of new cases is rising, not falling. Experts have speculated about dietary patterns and obesity as factors. A person with a family history is important. According to the National Cancer Institute, about 75 percent of colon cancer cases are sporadic, while in 25 percent of cases there is a family history that suggests genes or common exposures as factors. A person with a family history of colon polyps may need to be screened earlier than age 50.

Susan Dull works on a painting at Crossroads Art Center on Staples Mill Road. Works by artists who used jeans and/or denim jackets as canvases, including Dull’s peacock piece (right), will be auctioned off at the art center on Friday as a fundraiser for Hitting Cancer Below the Belt, a group focused on raising awareness of colon cancer.