

Hopkins County Relay for Life: Why the annual event is such a big deal

Written by — Compiled by Faith Huffman, News-Telegram news editor
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Relay For Life is a big deal in Sulphur Springs. Once a year, a couple of dozen teams fill the “walking track” for at least 12 hours to raise funds and awareness for the American Cancer Society and the research and help programs the agency supports. This year, RFL will be held downtown from 7 p.m. Friday, May 16 until about 7 a.m. Saturday, May 17.

But, RFL is so much more than just ACS’ annual fundraiser — it is a chance for the entire Hopkins County community to come together to honor those who have won or are battling cancer, and remember those who lost the fight. It acknowledges what these individuals, their families and caregivers go through, and allows the community to show their support. Since early detection is often key to treatment of the disease, awareness is just as important as fundraising.

RFL is very personal for so many individuals and families, with reports of more people diagnosed and treated regularly. A few RFL Committee and members this year took time to explain why they are so committed to RFL. Here are there stories, in their own words:

SALTILLO ISD TEAM

Johnna West



Saltillo started doing Relay for Life in 2005. As the sponsor, I did my first Relay in 2000 with my family. We had three survivors my aunt, dad and me. I got the school involved because Tony Aguilar came to some of the schools wanting them to get involved with Relay to have more youth teams. We had a lot of fun and we started out with one team. Then, we grew to two teams and I started working with the committee.

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One year we froze to death with 32 degree weather and our sell item was popsicles and our theme was to Ice Cancer; needless to say, we sold a few popsicles and froze. I had to go home and gather all the blankets out of the house, and one time it rained us out. Relay finally moved into May when we hope weather will be better.

Then, the year of the Swine flu, the school officials said that the students could not be up at Relay and the teachers stepped up and came and walked for Saltillo FCCLA and it was really neat. The next year, we had a teacher and student team to represent Saltillo ISD. We have won a few awards like most luminaries, best campsite and most spirit. The students are a big help every year because we get them to help set up the luminaries and any job the committee needs them to do.

I had students, this year, text me to say that they were doing Relay in college which makes you feel good because it is a great community outreach for all ages.

We do Relay to help raise money to help those who need it or can't do it for themselves. To raise money, the teachers pay \$25 for each semester to wear jeans for Relay, we do a hamburger lunch for the teachers, sell chances on quilts, and sell luminaries.

I think the favorite part of Relay for Saltillo is the luminary service and being able to honor or remember the ones that have been gone on because of the disease. They also have fun being able to stay out all night and have permission doing it. We enjoy having parents come up and join us during the night.

Saltillo ISD is very understanding because they know that this is a great outreach for the students to participate in. Last year, we were joined by our youngest survivor on the team. She is a little sister of one of my sophomores and now is in remission.

This year, when we step out to do our laps the theme is "Tackle Cancer" and my students have decided we are going to be "Prayer Tacklers." I was real impressed because we don't do football and I was trying to fit basketball into tackle, but not them – they took it beyond.

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THE CRUSHERS TEAM

Amber Henry



I attended my first Relay For Life in Bonham, Texas, in 2006 because a friend invited me. I had a great time, but once I experienced my first luminaria ceremony, I was hooked! I had already lost a grandfather and a great-grandfather to cancer. It was touching how everyone united together to remember those who had lost their fight. Each year after that, I became more involved. And, each year, it seemed as if I had more reasons to be involved.

I lost an aunt to cancer. I lost an uncle to cancer. My friend's mom died of ovarian cancer. Another aunt was diagnosed with breast cancer. My cousin was diagnosed with breast cancer. Relay For Life wasn't just an activity I did once a year. It was now just a part of who I was...a part of who I am.

I lived in California for five years and remained involved there. I moved back to Texas in January 2012 and instantly got involved again in Grayson County. It was then that my reason for loving Relay For Life became even more real. I lost my childhood friend, Hollie, to breast cancer. Someone my age. A mother of two.

I moved to Sulphur Springs in 2013 and joined the committee as soon as I got here. I am excited to be involved here in Hopkins County for the first time...my eighth year. I don't want to lose anyone else to this horrible disease. I can either talk about it...or I can do my best to make sure I make a difference. I will fight back.

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CUMBY ISD TEAM

Lee Gifford



Cumby ISD has participated in Relay for Life for about nine years. Students in junior and high school participate and some students use this activity to count as a service project for Beta.

Students usually raise money by participating in “Trick or Treat Cancer” and “Good Friday for a Good Cause” fund raisers. The students have also had a variety of silent auction items to raise money. This year, the students are auctioning off a horse in the silent auction.

Students from Cumby have won awards for the most luminaries sold as well as best campsite and most spirit in previous years. The students that participate in Relay gain insight into the

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importance of giving back to their community.

They play a major role on the night of Relay by helping set up for the survivor lap and serving food. Cumby students have also volunteered to help with the survivor dinner held each year.

Cancer has touched the lives of most every student involved in Relay so it is an important event for them.

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ALLIANCE BANK TEAM

Carrie Friddle



My name is Carrie Friddle and I am a member of the Alliance Bank Team. Our team captain asked us if we would be interested in telling our story. Well, mine is probably like everyone else's but I will give it a whirl.

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I became involved in Relay For Life in 2000 when I came to work for Alliance Bank in Greenville. I had never been to a Relay before and had no idea what I had gotten myself into. I raised my money and planned the campsite decorations for that year and even dressed up like a clown, but I had not prepared myself for the overwhelming feeling I would get that night.

At that point in my life I had not been personally touched by cancer, nor had any of my family members, yet I felt a calling from God to continue on every year with the fight to find a cure.

This year will be my 15th year to be involved in the Relay for Life, my second year in Hopkins County. In those 15 years, I have worn several hats for Relay. I have been a team captain, online chairman, team registration chairman, activities chairman, accounting chairman, and I have worked on the survivors committee. Each and every year I always said that this year was my last, that I needed a break, but for some strange reason I kept doing it year after year after year.

About four years ago, my father got some news right before Christmas ... he had Cancer. At that moment, all of the years of hard work had ALL made sense to me. I knew why I had to do it — for my dad, my hero, my friend.

I will continue to Relay for my daddy who is cancer free as of January. Thank God. So this is my story. I Relay for a CURE! I will fight for those who can't, remember the ones we have lost and continue on until I can't Relay anymore.

Beverley Owens

My family has always participated in Relay for Life. Rather, we volunteered with a team though work or with our church or just come out in support and walked the track.

Cancer has touched our family as I'm sure it has for almost everyone in some way in our community. To me, it's important to show support in our community for all the families that have

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been touched by cancer.

Relay for Life is a time to come together with family and friends and all the community to remember those we have lost to cancer and to celebrate those that have conquered cancer.

We are blessed to live in such a loving and giving community, and someday if we all share in this together, then maybe we will know a world where there is no cancer, how awesome that would be!

CITY NATIONAL BANK TEAM

Paula Murray



I Relay to help to raise awareness of cancer and raise funds to fight cancer. This year we are

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doing “Laps for Leota,” our friend and fellow co-worker.

We currently have a co-worker who has breast cancer. The photo that we are submitting with this article, is our friend and member of our CNB family, Leota, along with a few of her co-workers wearing their ‘Laps for Leota’ t-shirts. We will be wearing our “Laps for Leota” t-shirts during the RFL. Even though she had to endure numerous treatments, we are proud to say that today she is doing well.

On a more personal note, this is important to me because I lost my father to lung cancer, my mother had melanoma, my sister has breast cancer, and my cousin and her husband both have lymphoma. Many of us on our team have family members or friends who have some form of cancer or have lost loved ones due to this terrible disease.

It is important to understand that cancer can attack any one of us at any time. It can completely uproot a person from having a healthy life to fighting for their life.

I have been involved in some form or fashion since 1989. I became involved when we found out Mother had melanoma in 1988. A few months later, we found out my father had lung cancer. My father died within 9 months. During the time Daddy was bed-ridden, Momma was back in the hospital having her lymph nodes removed due to the spread of melanoma. After years of treatments, she was cancer free at the time of her death.

What “gets” to me most at RFL are the luminaries. It is heartwarming to see them lit up in memory of or honor of a loved one. It is both an awe-inspiring and humbling experience when the lights go off and we stand in front of our luminaries with a moment of silence out of respect for that person. At the same time, they are showing photos of those lost or being honored. This gives such a strong sense of honoring our loved, lost and those still fighting.

SULPHUR SPRINGS HIGH SCHOOL TEAM

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Mynder Kelly

Why do I Relay? Almost 27 years ago, we heard the word CANCER.

The doctor asked my husband if he could be in Dallas by 2 p.m. We said, “Yes, we can,” and we were going to Dallas every day, Monday through Friday.

My division manager at GTE (now Verizon) called me into her office and said, “Mynder, you don’t have to drive your husband to Dallas. GTE pays a day’s wage to the American Cancer Society so that they can provide you with a driver.”

That was when I was introduced to ACS Road to Recovery. It was a Godsend. Many different people provided us a ride to and from the hospital, day in and day out. When my husband was too weak to ride, ACS provided a room in a hotel so that he didn’t have to endure the long drive home.

When the doctor finally said there was nothing else they could do, ACS was at our home before we got there. They put a hospital bed at home and everything else that we needed was there.

The most important thing that ACS did is that they made me feel that I was not going through this alone and that others care and were there to make this hard time a little easier. That is why I Relay.

I will also Relay so that when someone is facing cancer, that there will be someone to give them a ride to the doctor and provide a room or a bed to help ease the burden of dealing with cancer ... and so people will know they are not alone.

ACS is there to help.