

'Relay for Life' fights cancer

Laura Gordon

Hearts are full of optimism throughout the 24-hour event as community members gather to raise money for research, education and treatment

It's 2 a.m. The lights have been dimmed around the football field at Newport Harbor High School and tents are scattered across the grass. It's quiet except for the steady sound of feet trudging along the dirt track. People are talking on the field and music plays softly from a stage, but the sound of moving feet cannot be drowned out.

An older man with shoulder-length gray hair makes his way around the track lap after lap. His black running shorts reveal his strong, muscular legs and it's obvious he is a marathon runner.

But the marathon he is running this night is not about distance; it's about time. Twenty-four hours to be exact, all to help find a cure for cancer.

Phil Newberg of Newport Beach started running when he was just a kid, said Anna Lisa Biason, the co-chair for the fourth annual Newport Beach Relay for Life. His mother did not give him bagged lunches, but made him hot lunches instead. Newberg would have to run home, eat and run back to school because he wanted to play.

Today, Newberg's running isn't just helping him make friends, it's helping to fight cancer.

"He ran approximately 70 miles at relay weekend 2005," Biason said. "Except for a few stops, he was on the track the whole time. Last year he was on the track non-stop for 24 hours."

Newberg isn't the only person with such dedication. The American Cancer Society's Relay for Life is a nationwide event and three million people are expected to participate this year.

Relay teams camp out on football fields for the event and start the walk with a survivors lap. Later in the evening, a luminaria ceremony honors cancer survivors and remembers those who have died.

Luminarias placed on the bleachers next to the tracks spell out the words "hope" and "cure."

"Our hope is that they find a cure and that our team makes a difference," said Wendy Koudelka, the captain for Team Broad Squad.

Dressed in bright pink bowling shirts, the women of Team Broad Squad spread their enthusiasm throughout the Newport Beach relay event held May 13-14. Their campsite sparkled with glittered posters and shiny decorations that helped make the setup all the more festive.

"It's almost like a carnival atmosphere," Koudelka said. "We want people to have a good time and we want to draw attention to why we're here."

Team Broad Squad also sold various items at their Broad Squad Boutique as a way to raise even more money for the American Cancer Society during the Relay for Life event.

"We sold breast cancer pins, drinks, candy bars, things kids would like," Koudelka said.

Each year Team Broad Squad tries to build on their reputation and Koudelka said there is a certain expectation for the team. They're known to be the loudest and most fun team, Koudelka said.

"It's a controlled out-of-control [enthusiasm] and we get a lot of positive feedback," Koudelka said. "We love for our enthusiasm to pass on to other teams."

Koudelka, who has been a part of Relay for Life for the past three years, takes pride in her team's dedication.

"Trying to stay up [for 24 hours] is challenging, but I don't take a nap or sleep," Koudelka said. "We're a very disciplined team."

That discipline stretches late into the night when team members must continue walking the track. For Koudelka, it's her favorite time to walk.

"I prefer to walk in the middle of the night because I like to see all the luminarias," Koudelka said. "I look at the luminarias [that line the track] and read the messages. It's a private moment and it's quite moving."

In March, Koudelka's mother-in-law died of Parkinson's disease. She was a 10-year breast cancer survivor and this year Koudelka walked in honor of her. Other members on Team Broad Squad participated in memory of loved ones or showed support for cancer survivors.

For the second year in a row, Team Broad Squad won the award for the most money raised by a team and Koudelka won the award for most money raised by an individual.

"But I don't do this for the awards," Koudelka said. "It's about raising money for the cause and raising awareness."

Koudelka and other relay participants' efforts have paid off since the Newport Beach Relay for Life raised \$106,700 last weekend.

Dana Colbert hopes Fullerton's Relay for Life will be as successful as Newport Beach's event.

"My major hope is to get every sector of the community involved," said Colbert, the community development manager for five relays in Orange County. "But it's difficult to get the word out to everyone."

Although this is Colbert's first year working for the Relay for Life, she said the event is an opportunity for community organizations to get together to fight cancer and work toward a common goal.

"Right now there is a lot of focus on treatment, but eventually I'd like to see more focus on prevention," Colbert said. "A lot of cancers are preventable."

The Relay for Life closest to Cal State Fullerton is Fullerton's Relay for Life that will be held at Fullerton Union High School on June 25.

Organizations like the Boys and Girls Club of Fullerton and the new Fullerton Flyers baseball team have already signed up for the event.

Relay for Life events will be held on various dates through August in such cities as Huntington Beach, Garden Grove, Anaheim, Yorba Linda and West Covina.

People interested in joining teams or starting teams of their own can visit www.acsevents.org for more details about how to get involved and find out where other local Relay for Life events will be held.

"Walk for those who can't," Koudelka said. "That's why we're here."

Gordon, Laura. "Relay for Life' fights cancer." [The Daily Titan](http://www.dailytitan.com/vnews/display.v/ART/2005/05/19/428c3f1c0eb12). 19 May 2005. 21 June 2005
<<http://www.dailytitan.com/vnews/display.v/ART/2005/05/19/428c3f1c0eb12>>.