

Stamping out cancer

Written by By Dee Velasco For the Sun
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Local teams race to raise funds

“Survivors make it personal, Scientists make it happen, Teams make it possible.”

These sentiments were felt at the Annual American Cancer Society Relay For Life held at the Gallup-McKinley County Downtown Courthouse Square, June 15-16.

This year’s theme was “Christmas in June – Wrapping up a Cure,” where numerous Relay For Life teams came and set up their own Christmas scenes at their booths. Teams such as: Big Dreams, Team Navajo, A Family Affair, to name a few held their own concession stands to do their part in raising money for the relay.

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The event took off with a color guard/flag ceremony followed by a survivor blessing, which led into the procession of fun events in hopes of raising money. A purse auction, Zumba, and luminaria ceremony with a quiet reflection were all a part of the festivities where a good abundance of supporters showed up – and cancer survivors as well.

One cancer survivor is Linda Shelton of Gallup, who is attending her twelfth relay. Shelton has survived two types of cancer for the past eight years and has been the chairperson for the relay for the past 10 years. According to Shelton, her current treatment is going well. But, she recalled her mother's battle with cancer, which took her quickly.

"My mother's cancer was so advance that they couldn't identify it and it took her so fast," she said. "For myself I had endometria and now I have lymphoma. I just take one pill every day and that is my treatment, and visit my doctor once a month. I use to see my doctor once a week but now just once a month and that's definitely good news."

For Shelton, surviving cancer may not be understood by others, but she says the biggest support comes from her family and friends, which always hits home emotionally.

"What helps me is the support of my friends and family, which makes me cry," she said, as tears flowed. "Right now my sister calls me every day she lives in Massachusetts, but I have a lot of friends and they take good care of me."

One of those friends is Pam Yardley of Gallup. She has worked as a counselor at Gallup High for the past 18 years, and is the logistics chairperson for the relay. Her job entails gathering permits for the event, setting up the contracts, contacting the proper law enforcement, and doing the legwork for the relay. She became involved with the first relay in Gallup due to losing a close friend to breast cancer.

"In 2009, I became in charge of the team for Gallup High and we've been doing it ever since to do our part. Everybody does a little bit and that all counts big," she said.

According to Yardley, this event is unique in the fact that most people have been touched by

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cancer in some form. When her friend had passed away from cancer, some of the she engaged in before she died were experimental and they weren't covered by insurance due to the fact they were just that – experimental.

“People need to be informed about the causes ... they need to be informed about what they can do to help themselves,” she said, “I’m the sponsor for Gallup’s “Students Against Destructive Decisions,” and people don’t know that alcohol abuse can cause liver cancer; smoking causes lung cancer as does marijuana; and it is about the choices you make. I want the kids to know that there are better choices than doing those things.”

A Friday night candlelight vigil featured names written on luminarias to honor those who lost their battle with cancer.

Eighteen-year-old Dennis Tsosie of Yatahey was one of many who came to honor his late mother Angie Tsosie who had Stage 4 colon cancer. Recently graduating from Gallup high, his mother never got the chance to see him graduate having passed away December 2017. She was 47. Dennis Tsosie said the cancer came on quickly and took the family by surprise.

“Being there the first day she was diagnosed and the last day when she passed away through the whole stages of it I was just traumatized,” he said. “I thought she would be at my graduation or even see me go off to college. But being here strengthens me in a very big way. I never really knew what Relay For Life was and why they raise money.”

One team that helped raised money was “A Family Affair.” Tammy Mecale of Gallup says her family also has also been touched by cancer. Being a collective effort to raise funds, Mecale says her family has been doing this for the past six years. Her brother James Mecale is a survivor of cancer.

“We do this for him and for other family members that unfortunately have lost their battle to cancer,” she said.

The relay continued on for two days with a breakfast being held on the last day along with a box

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car race and closing ceremonies to wrap up the event. Inspiring words of encouragement were often placed strategically at the relay: Hope, Support, Care, Love, Fight, and Inspire.

Altogether the roughly 20 teams and participants for this year's Relay For Life raised more than \$53,000 and counting.

For more information visit www.cancer.org

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