

Relay for Life - Team Bengals

Written by Story and photos by Shepherd Waldenberger Sun Correspondent
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There are 15 teams in Gallup participating in Relay for Life, but only one from a school – Team Bengals of Gallup High.

Pam Yardley, who has been a counselor at Gallup High School for 16 years, started a relay team five years ago with a small group of students. The goal is to raise money for the American Cancer Society, who funds research and treatment for the deadly disease.

Relay for Life started in Washington in 1985, and has since spread around the world and has raised nearly \$5 billion.

Team Bengals is led by captains Jesus Belleza and Michelle Rascon and includes 15-20 students. In the past two years, they have raised over \$8,500 for ACS, and they show no sign of slowing down. Michelle, a senior in her second year with Relay volunteered to be a captain because she has three family members with cancer and “wanted to do more for Relay for Life.”

Gallup High’s team also has two members who serve as youth chairs on the Gallup Relay for Life Board, and they happen to be siblings – Kyria Yazzie, a senior, and her younger brother

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Kyle Yazzie, a sophomore. Kyle credits his sister for getting him involved in Relay, and says “it’s fun to help other people.”

Kyria, who is also president of Students Against Destructive Decisions, is in her fourth year with Relay and has seen it grow and expand over her time at Gallup High. “More people are starting to help out as the years go on,” she said with a smile.

The Yazzies had a unique opportunity to visit Sante Fe on Feb. 15 of this year to speak with lobbyists about bills related to cancer. They expressed their support for three measures: a tax on tobacco, securing funding for breast and cervical cancer screenings, and securing funding for tobacco prevention. Kyle expressed that “it was good to speak up for different bills to help prevent tobacco use,” and both students gained a boost of confidence from expressing themselves in the state political sphere.

“I think they were awesome representatives for Gallup,” said Yardley.

One of Team Bengals’ major yearly fundraisers takes place at Denny’s, where students volunteer to wait and clear tables in exchange for a percentage of all income made during the time they work. Though students give up their precious weekend time for this event, Kyria says “it’s actually pretty fun.”

“Some people actually got job offers,” she added.

This year, Team Bengals raised \$800 during their Denny’s fundraiser on the weekend of March 12.

Yardley was originally inspired to create a student Relay team when someone told her “you’re not going to be able to get high school kids to do anything.”

Team Bengals has crushed that assumption, and they have a great time doing it. Many

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members have become involved with other fundraisers, such as Toys for Tots, as well. Of her team, Yardley said, “they have a positive attitude; they want to pull everyone up.”

The main event for Relay for Life will be held at Courthouse Square on June 10. It will be an all-night affair where survivors share their stories, families honor lost loved ones, and luminaries light the up the night.

Team Bengals’ next big fundraiser will be at Sizzler’s restaurant on April 19.

Yardley and her students encourage other schools to create teams and participate in Relay for Life. Every dollar raised helps combat cancer, and teaming up for a great cause can be a fun and rewarding experience.

If you are interested in creating a team, contact Pam Yardley at (505) 721-2518 or Linda Shelton (Relay event chair) at (505) 722-2175.

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