

When the checks arrive totaling more than \$400 million, it’s because the Relay for Life nationwide refuses to quit until a cure is found

This year, volunteers can Relay for Life on land or sea

By Anne Siren

PELICAN STAFF

Broward County – There was a time, not too many years ago, when the word “cancer” was hardly spoken in “polite society.” Many people today remember cancer as the “C” word-something implying guilt or shame.

How times have changed. People are talking cancer, beating cancer, researching cancer and hunting it down like a bully on the run.

And The American Cancer Society through its Relay for Life program has brought cancer from its dark, sad confines out into the streets, the parks, the high school campuses and even into the ocean.

And there’s still time to get involved

On April 5, starting at 4 p.m. 43 teams [316 participants] will “Relay” at Quiet Waters Park with music, entertainment, speeches, games and more.

This event combines participants from Lighthouse Point, Hillsboro Beach and Deerfield Beach. At press time, this Relay group had raised over \$60,000 to help defeat this disease through research.

On April 12 at Community Park, 820 NE 18 Ave., hundreds of people, along with their friends and family will celebrate Relay for Life. Pompano Beach Commissioner Charlotte Burrie chairs this year’s event. “The night will be worth the trip,” Burrie says. “It’s not only the night itself. We are all working together to raise research funds for the American Cancer Society. The event is just around the corner, but it’s not too late to get involved. Attendance is free, and there will be groups offering food, shirts and other items for sale. These proceeds also add to the research fundraising. We are going to find the cure!”

In Lauderdale-By-The-Sea, on April 26, ceremonies start at 9 a.m. at El Prado Park with opening ceremonies at 9 a.m., Luminaria at 8 p.m. and closing ceremonies at 11 p.m. So far these 13 teams have raised \$6,000 with a \$75,000 goal. The LBTS theme is “everything water related.” Along with walking they kayak, paddleboard, scuba dive and play beach volleyball. John Boutin chairs Relay in this town.

Oakland Park Relay teams take place at Fort Lauderdale High School at 6 p.m.; Luminaria begins at 9 p.m. and closing ceremonies take place at 6 at 6 a.m. Email Anita Horten to volunteer at rty1218@aol.com.

How Relay works

After the crowds arrive, many will pitch tents to stay all night, the ceremonies begin with



Survivors take to the track at last year’s Relay for Life in Pompano Beach. [Photos courtesy of The American Cancer Society]

honoring different groups of people. Since the original Relay took place at a high school track field, today many Relays follow that lead.

The first to be honored are cancer survivors. In many cases that is the first lap around the track.

A survivor is anyone who has heard the words, “You have cancer.”

Survivors will be given purple sashes; they are considered the guests of honor at Relay for Life. Survivors are proof that cancer can be defeated. All cancer survivors are welcome to walk this lap. They should call 954-200-7536 to register and arrive at the event 30 minutes early. There is no cost.

One of the most solemn moments at Relay takes place after sunset. Dubbed the luminaria walk, this lap is for anyone who wants to remember loved ones who have been lost to the disease. For others, the luminaria walk may be for a loved one who is fighting the disease.

A luminaria is decorated and placed on the track where hundreds of participants will walk throughout the night. Candles inside the bags light the perimeter of the track.

Readers may purchase their own bags by visiting relayforlife.org.

As darkness covers the event, some volunteers fire up their campsites, put up their tents and begin this night with determination.

What is the night? It is a symbol. The all-night walking reminds everyone that cancer never sleeps.

And on this night, these foot-soldiers prove that they too will never stop searching for the cure.

Musicians, games, tent meetings and connecting with neighbors are very much part of Relay.

None of this would happen without local leaders who have been working all year for this Relay.

Nona Breitenstein chairs teams in Lighthouse Point, Deerfield Beach and Hillsboro Beach. Her volunteers have been very creative this year. A recent fundraiser was held at Northeast Focal Point in Deerfield Beach, dubbed “My Big Fat Relay Wedding.” In addition, there

have been bowling nights, car washes and other events.

Breitenstein is no stranger to cancer. She has lost family members to the disease.

“There is so much research has brought to the game,” she says. “It’s no longer a one-size-fits-all cure. Treatment has become specific, and we have seen the mortality rate decline.”

Breitenstein oversees 41 teams that meet monthly. At press time, these teams have raised between \$46,000 to \$50,000.

In Pompano Beach, Gwen Leys, who has been assisting Burrie, gives a laugh and asks, “Who can ever say no to Commissioner Burrie?”

Instead, Leys will have a “Bounce for the Cure” with bounce horses, managed by Pompano Beach High School Key Clubbers and Pompano Has Heart. Pompano Beach has 22 teams participating in the night.

Leys, a nurse, says, “I see how this disease can affect patients and their extended family. My grandmother had breast cancer and my mother-in-law has lung cancer. This was a natural for me. There is no question that we’re going to make it better, and we are also creating leaders for the future.”

Often the extended family members end up being caretakers for cancer patients. Relay for Life has not forgotten them. A special lap is dedicated to family members, friends and caretakers who stand with their loved ones throughout the battle.

As these event dates approach, team leaders are still planning. Leys said one of the latest additions to the night will be a U.S. Coast Guard bagpiper in Pompano Beach.

Relay for Life teams across the United States raise \$400 million annually to support education, research and other programs for patients, caregivers and their families.

These team leaders are still looking for participants to be at the park and be part of the Relay.



Walking as a survivor

“It’s amazing. My first walk was about 10 years ago. I really didn’t know

what was happening. You start the lap, and people cheer you on. You are so happy you have your life and so happy these people are cheering you on for getting your life back. The survivor lap is a reality check for those times when you think things are bad. Everyone should take a lap for someone.” - **Lighthouse Point Commissioner Sandy Johnson**

Carol Landau to share her life as a survivor at Quiet Waters

Carol Landau, a cancer survivor, will tell her story at the Quiet Waters Relay for Life on April 5 at Quiet Waters Park.

As a result of her cancer and many surgeries, there remain tumors that continue to impact her life.

But Landau still reigns over her disease in every decision she makes.

First rule of Landau: Don’t be an ostrich. Deal with life as it happens. Don’t ignore your disease.

She doesn’t dwell on the number of days left for her; rather she takes action every day to make it a good day.

Landau is well known in Lighthouse Point as the city clerk for 10 years. This quiet, petite woman likes to travel in her camper van, rough it in the natural forests, explore new places and meet people along the way.

Her expeditions have taken her to the Pacific Northwest, the deserts of the Southwest and across the mid-section of the country back to Florida.

“That’s when I felt like I was who I wanted to be,” she says.

Her personal success over cancer has led her to some simple rules of living. Live the best you can. Make amends. Don’t be the person other people want you to be.

Landau says she has “. . . felt God’s love. I know what that feels like. My spirit is free.”

She gives up a laugh and says she “always wanted to shes will be spread from a plane. I’m okay with dying.”

Today she focuses on living. She takes her daily meds; meets up with friends for lunch, talks on the phone, writes on her



website, reads and is always willing to inspire others to deal with their own life issues.

“We can’t just sit around and wait to die. There are always new adventures and life experiences waiting for us. I will die the way I live, with the same positive attitude and outlook.”

All life comes to an end, but not everyone is as prepared as Landau. Her final wishes are clearly explained in one of her many documents she has prepared regarding her final days and her final distribution of private funds. She has taken all of those decisions out of the hands of family members so that her wishes will be fulfilled.

Death is a time of stress. Death will come. Landau urges people to talk about death with their family. “Many people are hesitant to talk about the subject; a subject that needs to be discussed so wishes are known.”

In a real way, Landau has triumphed over cancer through her joy of living and loving.

“Don’t keep things in,” she says. “Talk about it. Share your honest feelings with the people you know and the people you meet, so wherever you go, you are at peace.”

Join Landau on her website at carolsadventures.com.