

# Perris News

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## Relay for Life: Celebrate, Remember, Fight Back

Celebrate, remember, fight back.

That is the mantra for those taking part in the upcoming "Relay For Life" at Foss Field Park in Perris.

Debbie Villegas, chairwoman for the City's 7th annual event addressed the Perris City Council recently urging support for the race to find a cure for cancer. For her, the cause is personal. Her son, Paul, died from brain cancer in 2002, three years he was diagnosed with a brain tumor.

He was 30 years old.

"Cancer isn't discriminatory," Villegas told the City Council. "If it hasn't touched you or someone close to you yet, chances are it will. Even in these tough economic times we cannot afford to stop fighting this relentless enemy."

The Perris Relay for Life is scheduled for April 24-26 at Foss Field. City employees will be helping to arrange sponsors and logistics for the runners and several employees will be running to raise money and awareness. Villegas said the Perris group has a goal of raising \$56,000 in 2009, \$10,000 more than last year.

Since it began, Perris relayers have raised more than \$300,000 to fight cancer. The Perris Auto Speedway has been a major contributor, raising more than \$10,000 a year over the last several years.

Paul M. Villegas grew up in Perris and went to work as a firefighter while still in high school. He worked at Station 1 in Perris. He was so dedicated to his calling that he kept his firefighting gear in the seat beside him in his pickup truck. On dates his high-school sweetheart, who would later become his wife, would be forced to ride in the back of the pickup.

Shannan Villegas said she also got used to responding to fires and accidents while having dinner or watching a movie with Paul.

"He loved his job," she said.

Paul Villegas regaled his parents with stories about delivering babies, performing life-saving procedures at the scenes of car accidents and battling fires. Life was great for him—he was newly married and the father of a 6-month-old daughter—when he learned he was suffering from a glioblastoma brain tumor and told he had just months to live.

Paul Villegas fought the disease valiantly.

At one point, he even returned to work.

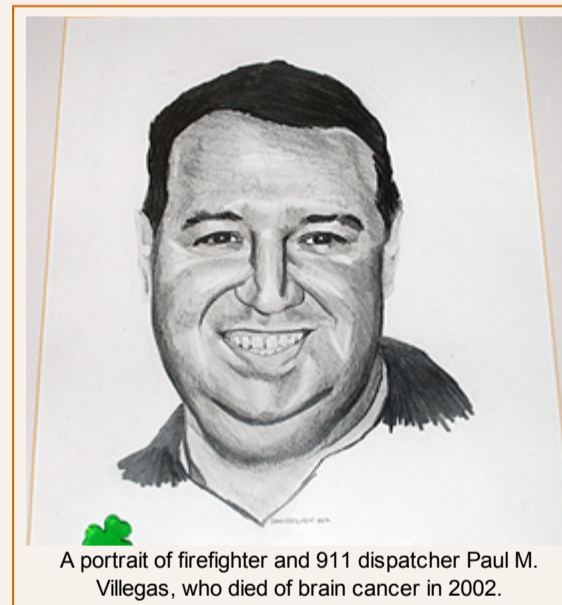
Even when the illness returned and sapped his energy, he still listened to fire calls from his scanner at home. He died Dec. 30, 2002, just hours after the birth of his daughter, Noelle. He also left behind two other girls, Hope and Mary Grace and two step-children, Rebecah and Anthony.

Debbie Villegas said she will take part in the April Relay for Life "so somebody else's grandchildren don't have to grow up without their father."

Shannan Villegas said she and her children will be relaying as well. One member of the family will be on the track throughout the entire weekend.  
Information: 951-657-6264 or [www.relayforlife.org/perris.ca](http://www.relayforlife.org/perris.ca)



Paul Villegas' family stand under a portrait of him in their Perris residence. Pictured are (left to right) his widow, Shannan, daughter, Hope, 9, stepson, Anthony, 13, step-daughter, Rebecah, 14 and his father, Benny Villegas.



A portrait of firefighter and 911 dispatcher Paul M. Villegas, who died of brain cancer in 2002.



Surrounded by supporters, Debbie Villegas, mother of Paul Villegas, addresses the Perris City Council, asking for support for the upcoming Relay for Life.