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## "Relay for Life" Rallies against Cancer



Perris Mayor Michael Vargas reads a proclamation in support of Relay for Life and told the crowd, "This event is very dear to my heart."

To support and celebrate.

To remember and honor.

To raise money for research and treatment.

And, most important of all, to fight the scourge of cancer.

Those reasons drove the volunteers, survivors and sponsors to Foss Field Park on the Perris City Hall Campus April 22 to take part in the annual American Cancer Society's 24-hour "Relay for Life." Over the course of a day, hundreds of participants walked around the park's perimeter, making laps, raising money and showing their commitment to whipping cancer.

Perris Mayor Michael Vargas addressed the crowd. For him, the fight against cancer is personal. His father, Joe Vargas, an Army sergeant and veteran of World War II and the Korean War, died of Hodgkin's Disease at age 53.

Michael Vargas was just 17 when his dad died. In addition, Vargas said his mother-in-law is a colon cancer survivor.

"I take cancer very seriously," Vargas said, adding that the Relay for Life enjoys the support of the entire Perris City Council. "This event is very dear to my heart and I urge all residents to support and participate in it. It's one of our signature events and is another example of great community engagement and collaboration, which makes for a successful event."

Vargas said events like Relay for Life educate the public about the disease and ways to avoid it, pointing out that the educational campaign about lung and other related cancers has led to a dramatic decline in smoking in the U.S. and California.



Cancer survivors release white doves during the opening ceremony at the annual Relay for Life in Perris.

### Survivors speak

Angel Behrens and Eber Salcido are cancer survivors who were stricken with the disease as young adults. Behrens is an 18-year survivor of cervical cancer, which was diagnosed when she was just 34. Surgery and radiation arrested the disease. She said cancer has touched other loved ones, including her grandmother, who was diagnosed with lung cancer and a childhood friend, who succumbed to brain cancer.

Behrens thanked the City of Perris for supporting Relay for Life.

"Without the City of Perris, we would not be able to do what we do to fight cancer," Behrens said.

The first lap at every Relay for Life includes survivors and caregivers.

Throughout the day, at least one person remains walking laps to show solidarity with the victims of the disease while raising funds to battle it. At night, luminarias—candles placed inside bags—are lit to honor everyone whose life has been affected by cancer and to remember those lives lost.



Cancer survivors walk the opening lap in the 2017 Relay for Life April 22 at Foss Field Park in Perris.

Salcido, a 5-year testicular cancer survivor, was among the first people to take to the track at Foss Field, accompanied by his wife, mom and three children. He underwent surgery to remove two cancerous tumors and regularly visits his doctors who monitor any changes in his health.

A construction worker who earned his living building bridges, roads and other public projects, Salcido loved his job and considered himself a workaholic. Cancer forced him to refocus his priorities.

"I had to figure out how to make time for family and friends," he said.

Salcido said he appreciates the City of Perris for supporting and hosting Relay for Life. The research dollars the event raises, the informational resources available and the support from caregivers, family members and public officials make it easier for those battling cancer to carry on the fight. And while waging his personal battle, Salcido keeps telling himself, "Every day is a gift."



Cancer survivor Eber Salcido took part in the annual Relay for Life at Foss Field Park in Perris. With him are (from left) daughter, Marina, 16; son, Vincent, 7; daughter, Julia, 9; wife, Tiffany, and mother, Nelida Salcido.

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