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Relay for Life Inspires Efforts to Conquer Cancer



Perris Mayor Daryl Busch takes a "Survivor's Lap" during the Relay for Life at Foss Field Park on April 23.

Cancer never sleeps.

And the people who gathered at Foss Field Park in Perris for the annual Relay for Life April 23 went without sleep for 24 hours to show support for those battling the disease and remember those cancer has claimed.

The City of Perris once again partnered with the American Cancer Society to host the relay to raise money for cancer research and treatment.

Teams of volunteers walked lap after lap at Foss Park over the 24-hour relay. The idea is to keep at least one walker on the track as a show of solidarity with cancer victims who never get a respite from the disease.

Perris Mayor Daryl Busch, a prostate cancer survivor, joined with other survivors to lead the opening lap around Foss Park.

"This is a wonderful event for a wonderful cause," he said. "Cancer affects almost everyone in every walk of life but it's not always visible. People walk among us who have this disease and you would never know it from looking at them. Days like this are important to raise money, awareness and hope. Thank you for coming out and supporting this event. Thank you for being here."

Prior to taking the field, opening ceremonies included several emotional testimonials from cancer victims and survivors.

Bob McGinty, a three-time cancer survivor who served as chairman of the 2016 relay, thanked the City of Perris for its support, which includes use of Foss Park, support from administrators and staff members. The City also fields a Relay for Life team led by Michael Morales, Capital Improvements Project Manager.

"It's totally amazing the support the City provides us—it's phenomenal," McGinty said. "It makes our job so much easier."



Zoe Sanchez-Richardson details her fight against cancer at the American Cancer Society's Relay for Life in Perris on April 23. Event chairman Bob McGinty listens to her remarks.

One woman's story

Zoe Sanchez-Richardson has been battling cancer for 15 years. Now 42, she was diagnosed with breast cancer at 27, a single mother with two children and no health insurance. She found the courage to battle that disease for 18 months and beat it. But cancer is a relentless foe.

At 37, breast cancer returned. Depression followed but then Sanchez-Rodriguez made up her mind not to give up.

"I told myself I would fight this disease harder than I've ever fought anything else in my life," she told the crowd.

She beat the recurrence for a year but the disease proved relentless. Since then, Sanchez-Richardson has endured bouts with stomach, cervical and uterine cancer and just last month a baseball-size tumor was removed from her neck.

"You name it, I've had it," she said.

Her diagnosis is terminal. But she still finds reasons to carry on.

"Cancer has been a curse but it's also been a blessing," she said. "It's taught us the importance of living and loving. And that is what life is really all about."



Perris City Councilman David Starr Rabb and Councilwoman Tonya Burke attended the annual Relay for Life and expressed their support for cancer victims and survivors.

Racing community steps up

Perris Auto Speedway promoter Don Kazarian has collected \$120,000 over the last decade, mostly from fans who put \$1 and \$5 bills into the helmets of racers as they pass through the stands during intermission.

Kazarian said his efforts are personal. His dad was a cancer survivor; the disease claimed his grandfather.

In the last year, the PAS racing community has been hard hit by cancer. Sponsors and car owners have lost their battle with the disease.

Kazarian said he appreciates the support of racing fans for taking the cause to heart. He's proud to play his part.

"It's our way to give back to the local community," he said. "The fans have endorsed this cause and it's become part of the fabric of the racing crowds. They know it. They support it."



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Inspiring remarks, people

Perris City Councilman David Starr Rabb listened to the comments of several survivors and those words left a lasting impression. He was particularly impressed with Sanchez-Richardson's story, saying "it shows the intensity of those fighting this battle."

Rabb said it's appropriate the Relay for Life coincided with the City's annual health fair, part of Live Well Perris.

"Living well encompasses being free from cancer and employing those preventative measures to keep from developing the disease," he said.

City Councilwoman Tonya Burke said her family has been touched by cancer. An aunt died from the disease and another aunt is facing a tough battle with cancer.

"These stories get me choked up," she said.

Burke said people should "live to the fullest" and support cancer research and events like the Relay for Life to assist those fighting the disease.

City Councilman Mark Yarbrough attended the relay in the evening, lighting a luminaria in memory of his granddaughter, Halle, which cancer claimed at the tender age of 4. Luminarias are small paper bags or lanterns with candles inside that are lit to honor people living with cancer or those who have died from the illness.

Yarbrough said the light from the luminarias cast an inspiring and haunting, yet inspiring glow, as relay participants made their way around Foss Park in the dark.

"We need to continue to apply all of our resources to battle cancer," he said. "It is a terrible disease."

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