

Light and hope at Relay for Life



Exhausted and wet but pleased, Relay organizers Audrey Mackey and Flo Vandermeer pose under the Sign of Hope at the end of the event. This year, the rain held off until 4 a.m.

By Tony Pearson

Cancer is a very scary word to many people. To those wearing yellow T-shirts last Friday evening, the word was a challenge met - a battle fought and won.

Local cancer survivors gathered in Millennium Park for Bancroft's annual Relay for Life. It is the area's largest fundraiser to help fight cancer. The money raised goes to programs to support local residents fighting the disease.

Survivors were joined by teams of fundraisers in a friendly competition to see who could pull in the most money to build resources against cancer.

This year the theme was Family Game Night, emphasizing that families band together to help each other through hard times.

Participants dressed as playing cards, dominos, scrabble pieces, and in a variety of other costumes.

At 10 p.m. the mood of the event turned sombre for the lighting of luminaries - candles within bags, decorated to honour those who have died from cancer.

The bags were laid along the walking track. Participants slowly marched past them, carrying their memories of those who had passed. Some bags had designs - a butterfly, hearts, a favourite flower, a symbolic animal, a medicine wheel. Some had pictures of the departed. All had the names of the loved ones.

The keynote address came from local survivor Mike Vatcher, who successfully beat stomach cancer after two years of treatment.

Last year, Vatcher was pronounced cancer-free.

The overall cancer survival rate is now over 60 per cent.

The story of a 10-year-old girl nicknamed Princess Andrea was also shared. She grew her hair with the goal of raising \$250 to cut it off. By last night, she had raised over \$700. The amount continued to grow as the evening progressed.

By the time the walk ended at 6:30 a.m. Saturday morning, the chair was able to announce that more than \$87,000 had been raised.

The leading team was the Game Changers, as they were last year when they were the Triple J Chuck Wagon team. Before the walk began, the team was honoured with the provincial Impact Award.

Over its years at the Relay, the team has raised \$85,000.