

17th Relay For Life promises many 'Reasons to Celebrate'

Written by Gothenburg Times
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The 17th annual American Cancer Society Relay For Life of Dawson County will be full of "Reasons To Celebrate" on Friday, July 29, at Haymaker Stadium in Cozad.

One of the most important reasons will be more than 100 area cancer survivors celebrating their victory over cancer during the Lap of Hope at 6:15 p.m. Survivor registration will start at 4:30 p.m.

The first lap is earlier in the evening than in the past. Event organizers bumped up the time of the survivor lap hoping to reduce the time period that survivors were waiting in the heat. Also, the earlier time allows survivors a little extra time to participate in other activities if they want to stay throughout the evening.

All are invited to participate in the free-will donation supper prepared by employees of First Bank and Trust in Cozad.

"We are inviting everyone to stop by Haymaker Stadium to be part of the fight against cancer at Relay For Life," said April Headley, event chairperson, of Gothenburg. "We have a great location with lots of activities for young and old. We have a live band, deejay, airbrush tattoo artist, Locks of Love and lots more.

"The survivor and caregiver lap and the luminaria ceremony at dusk are always inspirational for everyone who attends."

Team campsites will reflect the Reasons To Celebrate theme with traditional holidays like "Another Happy New Year," "Christmas—Tis the Season to Cure Cancer," "4th of July—Freedom from Cancer," and "Easter—A New Beginning."

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Other teams have a more non-traditional holiday spirit with "National Pig Appreciation Day—Rootin' For A Cure," "Wear It Pink" and "Happy Birthday, Elvis!"

Visitors are guaranteed a lot of fun celebrations with a total of 22 teams registered to camp out overnight at the stadium.

Celebrating their success in the fight against cancer, more than 300 team members have been working hard to reach the fund-raising goal of \$90,000. As of this week, the fundraising total has reached \$68,500 with bank night totals yet to be tabulated. Fund raising continues throughout the night during the Relay.

The popular silent auction starts at 6 p.m. with a wide variety of items including handmade afghans and quilts, a barn wood hat rack, garden décor, Nebraska beef, a complete auto detail gift certificate, a tattoo gift certificate and assorted gift baskets full of goodies. Bidding closes at 9 p.m.

The football field will be alive with activities throughout the night. Team activities include pony rides, "Kick The Habit" field goal contest, bean bag toss, a limbo contest, a racing scavenger hunt, dress up hot potato, a duck bucket, free bubble blowing and many more. Also visitors can expect to find a dunk tank, fun jump and steam powered ice cream maker.

The Miss Relay Contest organized by Cozad FCCLA starts with contestants being introduced at 8 p.m. The contest traditionally brings a lot of laughter when the willing male volunteers show up dressed to the hilt in prom dresses and heels.

The contestants then go out for two hours to "fill their purses" with donations. Miss Relay 2011 will be crowned after the luminaria ceremony.

More than 1,500 luminaria are expected to be lit during the ceremony, starting at 9:30 p.m. The names on these white bags represent friends and family members who have fought cancer and survived and to remember those lost to cancer.

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Luminaria may be purchased at the event up until the ceremony. The cost is \$10. After guest speaker Dean Brand of Lexington, a special slide show also will be presented.

Throughout all of this activity, team members will continue to walk around the track to demonstrate their commitment to fight cancer. As the evening events wind down, the luminaria will light the way for walkers during quiet time after 3 a.m. This is the time everyone really thinks about why we work so hard for Relay For Life, Headley said.

"Quiet time represents the part of the cancer patient's journey when things seem so dark and they can't find the end of the tunnel," she said. "Then the sun rises and hope is renewed."

The event will wrap up early Saturday morning with a Fight Back Ceremony and awards.

The public is invited to attend any or all of the Relay For Life event.