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Focus on '07: \$1 million mark surpassed by local Relay

By Nancy L. March, nmarch@pottsmmerc.com



John Strickler/The Mercury

The Pottstown Relay For Life went into the record books in 2007 as one of the smallest, fastest and most surprising members of the world's million-dollar club of American Cancer Society fundraisers.

The local Relay, held at Pottsgrove High School on June 2-3, exceeded a goal of \$1 million to

celebrate its 10th year. The achievement put Pottstown in the top five of Relays worldwide for 2007 fund-raising and in a class by itself among small-town Relays.

The \$1,005,896 raised marked one of the largest increases over a previous year and the largest amount of money raised between the time of the event in June and the campaign wrapup in August. The money goes to fund research and prevention programs of the American Cancer Society nationally, as well as as caregiver and survivor support locally.

Relay organizers had set the goal of "a million in a ten" early in the campaign and used it as a rallying cry to increase support. And, when the two-day Relay ended some \$120,000 short, the corps of Relay supporters didn't give up.

During the month of June, the committee joined causes with the Pottstown Area Fourth of July celebration and galvanized forces to continue the fund-raising.

"So many battles ... none forgotten" was the slogan that united memorials and tributes to both cancer victims and military veterans in a patriotic Independence Day celebration that combined with Relay's final push to reach goal..

On Aug. 8, at a counting meeting at Emmanuel Lutheran Church, the numbers went over the top. A \$3,500 check from Diamond Credit Union's team Diamond's Hope pushed the fund past the \$1 million mark.

Relay Chairperson JoAnn McKiernan said the force that kept on giving, even after the annual Relay was held, was unprecedented in American Cancer Society fundraisers.

The final number put Pottstown fifth in the world for money raised in 2007, but committee members were quick to point out they missed being fourth by only a few hundred dollars. At the kickoff for the 2008 event in November, Chairperson Kathy Brennan announced a goal of \$1.1 million for this year.

The Relay in June had the theme "A Moment in Time ... Ten Years of Hope and Counting," and involved thousands of area residents remembering, encouraging and fund-raising for cancer victims and caregivers. The highlights of the 24-hour event included the walk of survivors, that filled the high school track with a sea of purple T-shirts, and the luminaria lighting in the evening honoring team captains.

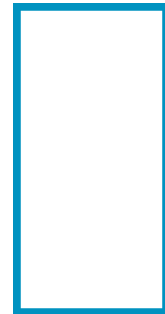
The silent late-night lap in a stadium lit only by candles provided a somber moment in contrast to the entertainment, food and fund-raising raffles going on throughout the daylight hours.

New to the Pottstown Relay in 2007 was the Canines for a Cure team of dogs that raised \$13,000 in online contributions. The canine team was first out of the gate this fall, already sponsoring a calendar and "Santa Paws" photo fundraisers for 2008.

But the greatest moment of the 2007 Relay was that counting night in August, when the organizers and team captains attending realized Pottstown would be going into the record books. As team captains brought in final collections from last-minute hoagie sales, church congregations, memorials and even a waffles-and-ice-cream social, the organizers knew how the story would play

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Maddi DeGennaro, a community liaison for the American Cancer Society, has seen other Relays in other towns, and she knows Pottstown's is different.

"It has a heart," she said of the local Relay. "It's not just about fundraising; it's about welcoming and caring for people with cancer and those around them. We had nearly 600 survivors at Relay this year, and you don't see that involvement in other towns.

"This Relay is not just Pottstown," she added. "It involves kids from Owen J. Roberts, teachers from Pottsgrove, community organizers in Boyertown and families from Spring-Ford, Collegeville and many places in between. When we say it's about a community that takes up the fight, we mean it's a community without boundaries, living and working together here to make a difference in the fight against cancer."

"This is what it's all about," said McKiernan. "People helping people and helping all of us to work toward a cancer-free world."

For a video of the 2007 Relay, go to www.pottsmmerc.com



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