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Pottstown, Pennsylvania

Relay reaches \$1 million goal

Participants and committee members of the Pottstown area Relay for Life celebrate the announcement that the Relay reached its \$1 million donations goal.



By Daniel P. Creighton/
The Mercury

By Nancy L. March
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"We came in tonight at \$997,000. Now, at 7:30, we are at one million, twelve thousand and ..."

The rest of the pronouncement was drowned out by cheers as confetti flew, purple balloons popped and hugs circled through the room to celebrate the Pottstown Relay for Life's accomplishment of reaching this year's goal of \$1 million.

A \$3,500 check from Diamond Credit Union's team Diamond's Hope was turned in at 7 p.m. Wednesday, putting the fund over the top.

But even as Relay Chairperson JoAnn McKiernan and Finance Chairman Dot Freeman made their 7:30 p.m. announcement, more checks were being turned in.

As of 8 p.m., the total reported at the campaign's final bank night was \$1,014,233.89 – enough to put the Pottstown Relay among the top five in the world in money raised for cancer care and research.

"I am overwhelmed," said McKiernan to the gathering of team captains at the last Bank Night of the 2007 campaign. "This achievement belongs to the entire community, not just the people involved with Relay. This effort has

involved everyone, and no one realizes that more than we do when we count up these donations.

"Sometimes it's \$5 and sometimes it's 500. But whatever the amount that people give, they give from their hearts because they care about each other," she said.

"Congratulation to all of you," she said to the team leaders gathered at Emmanuel Lutheran Church's social hall. "Your leadership has inspired the entire community to think beyond the moment and outside themselves."

Diamond's Hope joined Kathy's (See RELAY'S GOAL on A5)

Pottstown Relay for Life reaches \$1 million goal

(RELAY'S GOAL from A1)

Crew as two teams that raised more than \$50,000. Kathy's Crew is headed by Kathy Brennan, who will be the 2008 Relay chairperson.

The local Relay was held June 2-3 at Pottsgrove High School with a theme of "A Moment in Time ... Ten Years of Hope and Counting," and a goal of "a million in 10" to celebrate a decade of Relays in Pottstown to benefit the American Cancer Society.

This year's event involved 214 teams with 3,024 registered "walkers," who took turns walking laps around the Pottsgrove High School track during the 24-hour event.

Wednesday night, 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 of the first Relays remembered what the early going was like.

"I walked around the track crying," recalled Bev Price, who participated in the first Relay while newly diagnosed with cancer and who served this year as the event grand marshal. "I feel blessed to be here, in so many ways."

Sharon Basile, Peggy Neese, Dot Freeman and Deb Kurtz were oncology nurses who helped bring Relay to Pottstown. "I remember sitting at the VNA (Visiting Nurse Association) boardroom table, saying, 'Can we do this?'" said Neese, director of oncology services at the Pottstown Memorial Cancer Center.

Basile, who went to a Relay in Kutztown and brought the idea back to Pottstown, said the organizers had a goal the first year of \$50,000 and raised \$125,000. "That was when I set a personal goal of a million in 10," she said. After sharing that goal with others on the executive committee this year, the challenge took hold.

Reaching a lofty goal

The Pottstown Relay for Life will celebrate reaching its \$1 million goal by flying a hot-air balloon over the Pottstown area on Friday, Aug. 10, at 7 p.m.

The US Hot Air Balloon Team, owned and operated by Stan Hess of St. Peters, will launch a donated champagne flight from Pottsgrove High School, traveling in whichever direction the wind leads.

The balloon will carry a sign that says "Pottstown Relay and Community Raised \$1 Million to Beat Cancer - Congratulations!"

Area residents who look to the sky between 7 and 8 p.m. may see the Relay \$1 million celebration balloon congratulating them for their contribution to a cancer-free future.

The community will be invited to cheer on the hot air balloon flight and one person will win the opportunity to represent the community on the flight.

Everyone who joins the celebration at Pottsgrove High School between 6:30 and 7 p.m. will be offered a ticket. One number will be drawn to give someone a chance to travel across the sky with Relay team leaders and represent the community support that took Relay to \$1 million.

But not everyone involved was optimistic from the start.

Mary Kochel, a 90-year-old cancer survivor from Lower Pottsgrove, was president of the local board of the American Cancer Society when the idea for Relay came up. "You know Pottstown," I told people, "we won't sleep in tents," she said. "Tonight, I'm here to eat crow."

Maddi DeGennaro, a community liaison for the American Cancer Society, was also involved from the start and has seen the area embrace the Relay.

"This Relay is not just Pottstown," she said. "It involves kids from Owen J. Roberts, teachers from Pottsgrove, community organizers in Boyertown and families from Spring-Ford, Colleville 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.

"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."

Fundraising for this year's Relay began last November and continued up until the June event, with more than \$800,000 being raised through raffles, donations, corporate sponsorships, and craft and jewelry sales. In April, the teams came together with a community-wide fundraising event, "Run, Walk, Bark," that included a best-dressed pet contest, 5K run and walk with dogs.

Canines and kids got into the act - the dogs proving to be the

most Internet-savvy with an on-line fundraising campaign and kids walking for pledges in mini-Relays at nearly every school in the greater Pottstown area.

With an Aug. 10 deadline to report to the American Cancer Society, the final push came in the remaining weeks of the campaign and included sales of luminaria at the Pottstown Fourth of July celebration and a challenge to the community.

Linda Rudolph, who delivered \$3,745.89 on Wednesday from Diamond's Hope, said every employee of the credit union kept raising money to put the fund over the top. Pat Baer of St. James Lutheran Church said she made an announcement in church and soon had another \$400 in donations. Charlotte Fiedler of Team Great Strides brought in \$535 in donations and proceeds from

a hoagie sale held during recent weeks.

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

"These are not large corporate donations," added DeGennaro. "This is money from piggy-banks. Tonight, it's added up to become something incredible."

PARKINSON'S SUPPORT GROUP

Understanding Parkinson's

Join the August Parkinson's Support Group meeting to learn about some exciting new discoveries that may lead to a better understanding, diagnosis, and treatment of Parkinson's Disease.

WHEN:	Sunday, August 12, 2 to 4 p.m.
GUEST SPEAKER:	Rita Jewett, Coordinator Research for Parkinson's Disease University of Miami
TOPIC:	Parkinson's - More Than a Movement Disorder
WHERE:	The Reading Hospital Education Center
INFO:	No registration required. Call Ralph Blatt at 610-929-8627.



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