

THE NEIGHBORHOOD

World's largest fundraiser races into the Rose Garden

Event makes first appearance in the neighborhood

By MARY GOTTSCHALK

Between chemotherapy treatments and her seven-year battle with cancer, Tina Martignetti has plenty of things to do.

Yet, on July 16 Martignetti will take 24 hours out of her life and spend it on the track at Lincoln High School, participating in the American Cancer Society's Relay For Life.

Started in 1985, Relay For Life has grown into the largest fundraiser in the world, says Angie Carrillo, marketing communications director for the Silicon Valley Central Coast Region of the American Cancer Society. In two decades, Relay For Life has raised \$1 billion.

In Santa Clara County alone there are 20 different annual relays and now, the Rose Garden area will have its own with the one at Lincoln.

This will also be Martignetti's first complete relay.

She attended one in Vacaville at the invitation of her aunt, participating in the Survivors' Walk that follows the opening ceremony for each one.

This year, Martignetti decided to organize her own team and commit to the complete 24 hours.

"My team is mostly all my family and a couple of friends," she says of her team of 19. "I just asked them and they're really supportive."

Martignetti's family is very familiar with cancer. Her grandmother died of breast cancer and a year after Martignetti was diagnosed, her mother was also diagnosed with breast cancer.

Martignetti's breast cancer went into remission following chemotherapy and radiation treatments, but returned after a year. She is now fighting bone and liver cancer with chemotherapy.

Her mother's cancer went into remission for five years, but has also returned.

Martignetti says her mother, Mary Martignetti, isn't strong enough to participate in the relay, but hopes her mother will come visit them during the event.

Carrillo says the point behind the relay is to keep at least one member of the team on the track walking, running or just moving at all times during the 24-hour cycle. It's not unusual to see participants in a wheelchair.

"Everyone sets up tents and teams have themes," Carrillo says.

Each team member is asked to raise at least \$100, a figure Martignetti has already surpassed. More than a week before the July 16 start, her team had raised close to \$5,000.

"We did a spaghetti feed and had a raffle," Martignetti says. "We made \$3,000 on that and we had someone who matched us up to \$1,250 and then we got some sponsors."

Carrillo says there will be ongoing fundraising by some teams during the relay.

"They might sell flowers or sell back massages. One volunteer was talking about a spa area with foot soaks and there's always food—breakfast, lunch, dinner and breakfast again," Carrillo says.

The Survivors' Walk is an important component of the event, according to Carrillo.

"It lets us celebrate the fact that they've won or are winning their battle," she says.

Perhaps the most poignant element is the luminaria ceremony at dusk. Paper bag luminarias are given away, although a donation of \$10 is requested. They are then decorated and dedicated to the memory of someone who has died or dedicated in honor of someone who is fighting or who is a survivor of the battle against cancer.

The luminarias will line the edge of the Lincoln track and the candles will be lit around 9 p.m., to be left burning throughout the night.

Carrillo says there are always informational displays, and a special survivors' tent will be erected where survivors may go and relax and where people who are interested in talking to them can visit.

Additionally, she says there is usually entertainment, including music, and frequently a midnight pizza run.

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However, in deference to the Rose Garden and Shasta Hanchett Park neighborhoods, the period from 10 p.m. to 7 a.m. is a quiet one.

The exact number of participants at this first Rose Garden Relay For Life won't be known until the day of the event. Carrillo says while some teams preregister, there are often teams that show up the day of the event and want to participate as well, and all are welcome.

"We had a relay where just five teams showed up and then we had a relay in Salinas where 4,000 people showed up, and they raised \$1.1 million," Carrillo says.

A week before the Rose Garden event, only four teams had registered with approximately 40 team members total. Carrillo hopes to have at least 100 participants at this relay, even though it's the first one in this location.

Martignetti says she hopes a lot of people will come out even if it's for just a few minutes. She says she's happy to talk about cancer.

"I'll talk to anybody. I had a neighbor who just got cancer and I went over and talked to her. I don't mind talking about it to people at all. It's part of my life now, I've lived with it for seven years," she says.

Still, Martignetti isn't compliant.

"I'd like to find a cure so other people won't have to go through this. I wouldn't wish this on anybody, but I have a lot to live for," she says. "I want to see my niece and nephew grow up, and I plan to be here for a long time."

The American Cancer Society's Relay For Life takes place from 10 a.m. on July 16 through 10 a.m. on July 17 at the track at Lincoln High School, 555 Dana Ave. For additional information or to register a team, call 408.879.1032, option 3, ext. 127. For more information about the American Cancer Society, visit www.cancer.org or call 800.ACS.2345.



Photograph courtesy of the American Cancer Society

Taking Heart: The American Cancer Society's Relay For Life fundraiser is held in 20 locations throughout Santa Clara County. Relay For Life will take place on July 17 at the track at Lincoln High School.



Photograph courtesy of the American Cancer Society

Burning Bright: Paper bag luminarias honor those who are fighting cancer and those who have died of cancer. Luminarias will be lit and will line the track at dusk.