



News Release

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May 22, 2009
NR09070

NMCC Hosts Aroostook County Relay for Life to Raise Funds for the American Cancer Society

Aroostook County - This year's annual Relay for Life for Aroostook County will be hosted at Northern Maine Community College on Friday, June 5, through Saturday, June 6. Twenty-four area teams will walk throughout the night to help raise funds for the American Cancer Society.

Relay for Life is a fun-filled overnight event designed to bring together those who have been touched by cancer in our community. More than 200 Relays are being held throughout New England in 2009, all celebrating survivorship and raising money to help the American Cancer Society in its mission to save lives, help those who have been touched by cancer, and empower individuals to fight back.

"Aroostook County's Relay for Life has grown a great deal over the past few years, and we're hoping to build on that growth this year," said Becky Maynard, NMCC bookstore manager and co-chair of the planning committee for this year's event. "We've more than doubled the number of teams that are participating this year compared to two years ago. Hopefully, that will also mean an increase in the number of dollars raised and the level of awareness we are raising in the community about the impact of cancer on those we love and the need to do something to fight back and make a difference."

Last year marked Aroostook County's most successful Relay to date, with more than \$26,000 raised for the American Cancer Society, which was nearly a \$8,000 jump in proceeds over the preceding year. The group hopes to top that milestone and make this the third year running of the 'most successful' Aroostook County Relay for Life to date.

"The funds raised enable us to continue our investment in the fight against cancer through research, education, advocacy, and patient services," said Mike Hart, community executive for development for the American Cancer Society's New England Division. "The money raised by participants locally at this event goes directly to the American Cancer Society's lifesaving programs which happen right here in Aroostook County as well as throughout Maine."

The Relay for Life begins with an opening ceremony at 6:00 p.m., followed by a survivor/caregiver lap at 6:15 p.m., in which area cancer survivors and those who have cared for loved ones battling cancer are invited to participate. Thanks to the sponsorship of the Presque Isle and Caribou Inn and Convention Centers, all survivors who take part will be given a free Survivor t-shirt.

“The survivor/caregiver lap means a celebration of hope.....a celebration of all that the patient and caregivers have been through, sort of a ‘seal’ of beating the odds and surviving the dreaded C word,” said Julie Francoeur, whose sister, Karin Howe, is a pancreatic cancer survivor of almost three years. “When she was first diagnosed, it seemed like a death sentence had been given to my younger sister. We prayed, we cried, we researched, and she survived! She now lives with the effects of her cancer each day due to her surgery....but she never complains, just accepts what had to happen in order for her to survive. That is why I became involved in Relay for Life. That is why survivorship is so important to me...to help survivors celebrate what they have been through and to encourage them to keep on going.”

In speaking on the importance of the caregivers, Francoeur explains, “sometimes we can't actually ‘help’ the cancer patient, but we can certainly make sure their family is taken care of so the patient does not worry about them and can focus on their recovery. As a caregiver, some days I just sat quietly and knit while my sister rested, just so she wasn't alone. As a caregiver my husband often took her husband out for coffee so he could vent and talk about his fears away from my sister. A caregiver may not change bandages or give medicine.....but meeting the daily needs of the family of the cancer patient is more than enough to do!”

Both Francoeur and Howe are now active members of both the Teague Park team and the planning committee for the Aroostook County Relay for Life.

Cancer survivors and caregivers are also invited to the Survivors Reception being held at 7:00 p.m. on campus. This year's reception is being sponsored by Cary Medical Center. Francoeur has been one of the coordinators of this year's reception. “The survivor reception is a time to applaud the survivors and honor their caregivers. They are one of the reasons we Relay. Honoring them, applauding them, and giving them reasons to have Hope are why I get excited about survivorship,” she explained. “We are beginning a Garden of Hope for survivors this year. We will be giving each survivor a tree seedling to plant and add to each year. Our theme is Garden of Hope, Having Only Positive Expectations.”

Walkers for the Relay for Life will officially get underway at 6:30 p.m. with a parade of teams. There a large number of businesses and organizations with teams, including: ACAP, Aroostook Savings & Loan, Caribou & Presque Isle Inn & Convention Centers, Caribou National Honor Society, Cary Medical Center, Circle of Friends, Columbia Forest Products, County Federal Credit Union, Katahdin Trust Company, Maine Public Service, Maine State Employees Association Central Aroostook Chapter, Micmac Health Department, Mojos, Northern Maine Community College, State Farm Insurance, Teague Park School, The Aroostook Medical Center, University of Maine at Presque Isle, and WAGM-TV. In addition, there are several local teams of family and friends taking up the cause, including: Campers for a Cure, Life is Good, Pink Ribbon and The Raptors.

Community members are invited to come to the NMCC campus anytime from 6:00 p.m. through 10:00 p.m. on Friday to show their support in this effort to step up the fight against cancer. There are numerous special activities planned that will keep the whole family entertained.

Live entertainment from 7:30 – 9:00 p.m. will feature most of the Aroostook Idol winners during the past five seasons as well as other talented local singers. The group will join together to perform the touching song “Just Stand Up to Cancer,” which will be followed by a series of solo and duet performances by the entertainers.

There will also be many children's activities throughout the evening. A variety of hands-on activities will be offered courtesy of NMCC's early childhood education program. In addition, in keeping with this year's theme of Carnival for a Cure, many teams will feature carnival like games at their campsites. Some Shriner clowns will also be on hand.

At 9:00 p.m., a Ceremony of Hope will be held, during which all of the luminaries purchased in honor of cancer survivors or in memory of those who have lost that battle, will be lit and, following a moment of silence, the names of these individuals will be read aloud. The luminaries will line the track as well as spell out the word *Hope*. Everyone gathers around to remember those lost to cancer, support those fighting cancer, and rejoice with those who have successfully fought the disease.

Luminary bags are available for a contribution to the American Cancer Society. They can be purchased from members of any of the participating teams, as well as at the NMCC bookstore. They will also be available for purchase during the June 6 event preceding the ceremony. "This is a great way to honor people in your life who have had cancer or who have it right now. I think we all have been touched by cancer in some way," said Maynard, who lost her father in 2007 after a ten-year battle with cancer and lost an aunt last year to ovarian cancer.

The public activities will conclude after the Fight Back Ceremony at 10:00 p.m.; however, many team members will be on hand throughout the night, with a representative from each team mandated to be on the track at all times until the closing lap at 10:00 a.m. on Saturday morning. Several fun activities are scheduled throughout the night to keep the teams energized.

For more information on the Relay for Life, you can contact Northern Maine Community College at 768-2809, or go to www.relayforlife.org.

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