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Sayville held their 8th Annual American Cancer Society Relay For Life

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Shana Braff

On Saturday and Sunday June 12th through 13th Sayville's 8th Annual American Cancer Society (ACS) Relay For Life took place on the Sayville Middle School athletic field.

Twenty-nine teams and 184 participants raised a total of \$22,457.

The Relay For Life is an uplifting occasion for all involved. Each year more than 3.5 million people, in 5,000 communities in the U.S., along with additional communities in 20 countries unite to take part in this global movement.

It gives communities a chance to celebrate the lives of those who have battled cancer and remember lost loved ones while taking a stand against a disease that takes too much.

At Relay, teams of people take turns walking or running around a track, some even camp out for the duration of the night. Each team is asked to have a representative on the track at all times during the overnight stay.

The evening began with a Survivor Reception at 5 p.m. where all cancer survivors were invited to attend a dinner which was donated by MVP Caterers under a tent donated by Above all Tents. This was followed by the Opening Ceremonies, including the traditional Survivor Lap.

Luminary bags were sold for the Luminaria Ceremony, a highlight of the Relay. These keepsake bags are decorated in memory and honor of those with cancer. After sundown, candles placed by bags were illuminated. During this introspective time a silent walk occurred and those who have lost their lives to cancer were remembered.

The top team was Patsy's Gang with \$5,950 raised in honor of their family member Patsy. She passed away from lung cancer three years ago.

Co-captain Patricia Ruoff, Patsy's daughter said, "If we could help one more person with cancer it would be worth it, whatever we can do to make a difference."

Kathy Abreu, director of special event for ACS commented on how special the Relay is. She said, "It brings the community together as a whole. It's unique in that it is run by community volunteers ... They know the community, that's what makes it successful."

This year's Survivor Reception had a birthday theme, complete with a birthday cake and festive balloons donated by the company Party Planners.

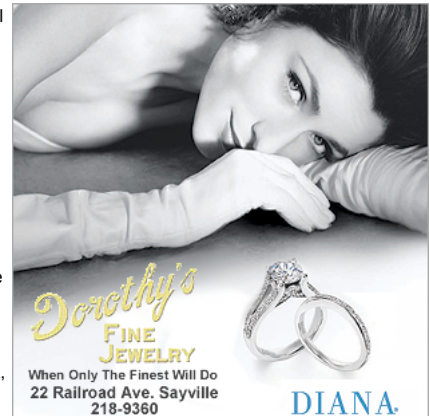
Survivor chairperson Amy Peters said, "It's one more birthday that they have."

Peters handmade a gift for each survivor, a message in a bottle containing this motivational inscription: "Dream big, be bold and have no fear!" The motto was pilfered from Dove Chocolate but seemed to fit the occasion to a tee."

Peters explained the heartfelt talisman "It symbolizes what they've been through ... It's something to protect them. They've got to have that hard shell to protect what's inside."

Johnny's Angels was the second highest grossing team with 5,145 generated. The team is made up of the family and friends of John Criscuola, 4, the Relay's youngest survivor. He was diagnosed with retinoblastoma at 6 months old and had to undergo two years of treatment. His father Anthony Criscuola said, "Now he goes back to the doctor twice a year and nothing has come back."

Event Chairperson Melissa McManus said, "It's another great year. We're always looking forward to next year; I take about two days off and start it all over planning for next year ... This is my baby. I want to just make sure we keep this going until we don't have to anymore."



Congressman Steve Israel was a special guest speaker at the Relay. He is the chairman of the House of Representatives Cancer Caucus and has spent a lot of time supporting research of potential cures and treatments and supporting families affected by cancer.

Congressman Israel said, "Tonight when you're getting tired think of the 190,000 women diagnosed with breast cancer in 2009 ... Think of the tenacity of the survivors and hopefully this will help you do a few more laps."

Howard Lehman of Sayville came to support the fundraiser because his wife and several family members have succumbed to cancer. The senior resident said smiling, "Today is my birthday; what better way to celebrate than being here."

To find out more info go to relayforlife.org/sayvilleny.



L-R Rich and Patricia Ruoff and Mary Bertuccio



Melissa McManus, Mike Bonkoski, and Kathy Abreu



John and Anthony Criscuola



Amy Peters



John Criscuola



Ovations Dance Academy



Zeta Sigma Phi sorority from St. Joseph's College



Mr. Hoffman and Alexis Skalkowski, Sarah Elsesser and French exchange student Gabrielle Dargier de St Vaulry of the Sayville H.S. Internet radio station



Congressman Israel and Amy Peters



Eight year cancer survivor Jen Schneider and her parents Rudy and Barbara Schnei



L-R Valerie Murray and Jessica Paulson

Contact the writer, Shana Braff: shanabraff@optonline.net

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