

Relay for Life of Gallup 2019

Written by By Dee Velasco For the Sun
Thursday, 04 July 2019 13:08



Going Wild For A Cure meets its goal

Marking year 20, *Relay for Life for Gallup McKinley County* 2019 drew hundreds of people to remember those taken by cancer and help celebrate survivors. The two-day event was held at the McKinley County Courthouse Square in Gallup June 21 and 22. The occasion was filled with activities, games, and special guests. Included were a scavenger hunt, Zumba, an auction, and raffles with a number of prizes including a Jeep Cherokee, two first-class, round trip tickets to anywhere in the world, or \$5,000.

As part of the Relay for Life effort to focus awareness on cancer, fundraising teams are formed. Some of them have colorful names like *Guys and Dolls*, *Ups and Downs*, and *Team Fort*. This year the teams participated in a parade displaying the theme

Going Wild for Cancer

. Each team chose a different animal, or anything related to wild animals for the parade.

Sponsorship Chair Linda Sheldon said, "After 20 years, we're Going Wild for a Cure. It was exciting to see the teams make their way across the front, so that everyone can see what animal they chose."

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The fundraising goal this year was \$75,000 dollars. It fell just short of that, raising over \$74,000 dollars. According to Event Chair Melinda Russell, pledges are still coming in. Kids and adults all chipped in. And in the end, Peter Campos, who has played disc jockey for the event for 19 years, pitched in the last \$550 to make the goal.

Navajo Nation President Jonathan Nez was one of the speakers who welcomed participants. Also at the event was 2013-2015 Inaugural Navajo Nation Poet Laureate Luci Tapahonso.

Tapahonso, whose family members suffered with cancer, after working in the uranium mines, is the author of at least eight books of poetry, and has been anthologized in others. She has written about cancer, among other topics.

At the Relay for Life she shared a poem about enjoying life from her book, *A Breeze Swept Through*.

"I was surprised you needed only that:

gentle touching, quiet little song

and you gave me a new confidence.

I had lost it somewhere during that time,

the easy laughter returned."

Excerpt from "For Lori, This Christmas I want to thank you in this way"

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For her part, Russell said, "I was amazed at the entire event from the very get-go. A local baseball team along with their coaches and parents showed up to help. Later, Girl Scouts came to help fill the luminaria bags, and the City of Gallup also pitched in. The crowd was just wonderful and to have the Navajo Nation President Jonathan Nez and Lucy Tapahonso here was a treat."

Russell said aside from the special guests; 16 teams helped out compared to only nine last year. That made it easier to recruit for the 20 year anniversary, and easier to raise money.

"It's our 20 year anniversary, so we really went all out to do everything better than we did last year. That doesn't mean we did anything wrong last year. It just means we had to put a little more effort into this year," she said.

Keeping track of this years' survivor list was Survivor Chair Joyce Graves. According to Graves, this year's number of survivors attending the event was down from last year which was around 90. Graves attributes it to the weather. Nevertheless, these survivors traveled great distances from as far away as Wichita, Kan. Others came from Albuquerque and Cortez, Colo.

"Anything that deals with the survivors we get them organized," she said. "We make sure they get signed up and give them a t-shirt. We even had all of them pose for a picture to remember what they've gone through and are going through." And no matter what, Graves says, keeping survivors abreast of events is key.

One survivor who remembers is Stephanie Plummer, who had Stage 2B breast cancer. Having survived for over a year now, Plummer related how scared she was when she found out she had cancer. She didn't know what was going to happen. All the unknowns in her future worried her. Once diagnosed she started going in for cancer treatment at the New Mexico Cancer Center here in Gallup. That's where she learned about Relay For Life.

"I saw flyers from last year's event and decided to come here," she said. "Since my remission, I then made the choice to give back by volunteering at the center and became involved with this event. My whole outlook on life has changed, and I live my life every second, I pray every day, and try to find the goodness and the beautifulness in my surroundings."

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