

Family rallies around Relay for Life

Written by By Molly Ann Howell Managing Editor
Friday, 12 April 2024 00:00



Brooke Menapace's mother-in-law Robbie Menapace was diagnosed with merkel cell carcinoma, a form of skin cancer in July 2021. That's when Brooke and the rest of the family decided to join the Relay for Life cause by creating their own team. They named it High Desert Cycle - Side by Side and then they were off.

In preparation for the 2024 Relay for Life, which will take place on June 14, the team set a goal of raising \$5,000. They've already beat that goal; they had raised over \$6,500 at press time.

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A Relay for Life team organizes fundraising events throughout the year to raise money for cancer research. The HDC-Side by Side team hosted a Galentine's Day event and a plant sale. They also found support from local businesses.

GROUP OF

GO-GETTERS

In an interview with the *Sun* Robbie praised her daughter-in-law for all her hard work.

"[Brooke's] a go-getter. I just love her. She comes up with the best fundraising ideas, and she works hard," Robbie said.

Robbie is in remission now. She did radiation therapy at the New Mexico Cancer Center at Gallup and went to the MD Anderson Cancer Center in Texas for radiation treatment. She said the community's support really helped her get through her cancer journey.

"They're all so good there [at the Cancer Center]. We may be a small town, but it's a good town. Everyone was supportive, they would ask me how I was, and when Brooke mentioned Relay for Life I thought 'This would be a good thing to do,'" she said.

Robbie said going to her first Relay for Life in 2022 taught her a lot about what it means to have cancer. She learned that the day someone is diagnosed with cancer, the organization automatically labels them "a survivor."

Brooke said her favorite thing about participating in Relay for Life was seeing the community

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support around town.

“I think my favorite part would be the community that Gallup has involved. It is a group of wonderful people who are working so hard to educate [and] to help raise funds for research,” she said.

COIN WARS

As a teenager and young adult, Brooke often donated to the American Cancer Society. When she worked at Rocky View Elementary, she met Joyce Graves, the Gallup coordinator for the national organization. With Graves’s help, Brooke started the Coin Wars program at Rocky View.

Coin wars entice kids to raise money for certain causes and purposes by having them bring in spare change for a set period of time.

But unlike traditional fundraising, the classroom with the most money raised actually loses the competition. Students sabotage other classrooms by placing bills in their jars. Dollar bills count as negative points while spare change helps rack points up.

Coin wars were held on a yearly basis at Rocky View, Roosevelt, and Lincoln Elementaries in the Gallup-McKinley County Schools district before the pandemic hit and the two former schools closed their doors.

Brooke looked back at her time organizing the event at Rocky View fondly.

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“The staff and students really enjoyed competing against each other,” she said.

Graves said she hopes to bring Coin Wars back to GMCS at some point in the near future, although she has faced some barriers.

“When they started changing things at the schools and demanding more from the teachers and putting all this testing on everybody, schools just couldn’t even breathe, so they haven’t been able to do [the Coin Wars]. I haven’t found the right person to say ‘Yes, I will do that,’” Graves explained.

RUN FOR MORE

INFORMATION

Anyone interested in donating to the High Desert Cycle - Side by Side or any other local Relay for Life team can go to the Gallup McKinley County fundraising page at https://secure.acsevents.org/site/STR?pg=entry&fr_id=107767.

The webpage also has details about the upcoming local Relay for Life, which is scheduled for June 14.

Teams will be able to arrive at the Courthouse Square as early as 12 pm that day, but they need to be set up and ready to go by 5:30 pm. The Opening Ceremonies will begin at 6 pm.

By Molly Ann Howell
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