

Wood Grove Relay for Life event celebrating '10 Years of Hope' in 2006

By Vicki Martinka

Staff writer

In 1997, the Wood Grove Relay for Life began with 13 teams and raised \$25,000. Nearly a decade later, the communities of Downers Grove, Westmont, Woodridge and Darien go into their Relay for Life with more than \$1.3 million raised for the overall lifetime of the event and hope to add another \$300,000 to that figure this year.

"Celebrate 10 Years of Hope" is this year's theme to commemorate the 10th annual event. There will be a birthday party atmosphere during this year's Wood Grove Relay for Life, to be held Friday, June 16, to Saturday, June 17, at Downers Grove North High School.

"I'm just so glad the four different communities have taken on this event to help in this great cause," co-chairwoman Jackie Provenzale of Downers Grove said.

In honor of Wood Grove Relay for Life's milestone, several longtime volunteers have shared their stories and memories of this event.

Joan Ackerman of Woodridge became involved in the Wood Grove Relay in 1998 as a team captain. She went on to serve on the planning committee, including three years as chairwoman, and now serves as a team mentor for team captains.

Her team, Ruth's Rugrats/Miles for Missy, honors her son's former day care teacher, Ruth Svirtun, and her son's girlfriend, Missy Montes.

"Their dignity and courage with their battle with cancer is an inspiration to us," Ackerman said.

Marsha Daudelin of Naperville recalled the early years of the Wood Grove Relay.

"You had to bring your own food because they didn't have the concession stand back then," said Daudelin, who's been involved since the second year of the relay.

Vicki Tuch of Woodridge has been impressed with the outpouring of community involvement through the years.

"It's grown incredibly," she said, adding there were very few teams in the early years of the event.

For Tuch, getting involved in the Relay for Life was something she could do

for her dad, who died of cancer in 1992.

"You can fight a traffic ticket ... but I had no way to fight losing one of the dearest people in my life," she said.

Tuch, who teaches at St. Scholastica School in Woodridge, formed a team of fellow teachers and former students the third year of the event after running into one of her former students who was on her way to the Wood Grove Relay the previous year. In time, a Girl Scout troop at the Woodridge school formed a team to honor one Scout's mom who was battling cancer.

"That just shows you it's like a domino effect; it just keeps moving on," Tuch said.

Provenzale encourages the community to come out to the Relay and support the teams.

"It truly is a community event. It's one big party," she added.

For more information about the Wood Grove Relay for Life, call Kristin Dee of the American Cancer Society at (630) 932-1141.

Terrific twos

While the 10th annual Wood Grove Relay for Life continues the fight against cancer, two other relay events return after their debut last summer.

The Relay for Life of Hinsdale, Oak Brook and Burr Ridge will be held Friday and Saturday, July 14 and 15, at a new location, Hinsdale South High School in Darien. Registration is \$25 per team of eight to 15 members through Saturday, July 1. Team members are asked to raise \$100 per person in donations. In addition, corporate sponsorship is a major fundraising component.

Last year the event raised \$28,000. This year's goal is \$40,000.

"It takes a few years (to be established), but Hinsdale, Oak Brook and Burr Ridge are great communities," Amy Garrison of the American Cancer Society said. "We believe every community deserves a Relay."

For more information about the Relay for Life Hinsdale, Oak Brook and Burr Ridge, call Garrison at (630) 932-1141.

Also returning for its second year is the Relay for Life of Lemont/Homer Glen. The event runs Friday and Saturday, July 28 to 29, at a new location, the soccer fields at Lemont High School.

Amy Bogatto of the American Cancer Society described last year's event as "absolutely wonderful."

"They were able to raise over \$68,000 as opposed to the \$30,000 they were expected to raise," she said.

So far more than 30 teams have signed