

Going in for a close shave ahead of Relay for Life



By Brock Weir

Ivy Henriksen is the first to admit that people think she is 'a bit nuts' for auctioning off the shaving rights to her head this Friday, but she is not one to step back from taking a 'leap of faith.'

Ms. Henriksen, an employee of the Town of Aurora who takes on the mantle of Manager of Customer Relations this week, will put on her smock and brave whatever the winning shear-wielder has in store for her on Friday to raise awareness of the Aurora Relay for Life that evening and raise money for the United Way in the process.

A long-time supporter of the Relay for Life and the Canadian Cancer Society, this year's run will be extra poignant for her as she supports her sister-in-law, Sherry, on her second journey battling the disease. She became involved with Relay for Life in Sherry's honour after she first beat the disease 10 years ago.

Participating in the Brant Relay, close to her original hometown for the past seven years, Sherry, Ivy, along with their respective mothers, cousins, and close friends have formed 'Sherry's Sugar Bears', a team which takes the Relay by storm year after year.

'Cancer can reach out and touch everyone,' says Ivy. 'This is her second battle in her mid-30s - healthy lifestyle, very family-oriented, strong family support, professional, goes to the gym, but unfortunately there are no boundaries for cancer.'

'We have lots of survivors in our community and how we see survivors surviving for 20 or 20 plus years, and every year when I return to Relay for Life, there are more survivors, which is a positive, but it is also showing there are more people getting touched by cancer.'

Sherry's Sugar Bears got their moniker, she says, for being a team that is 'notorious for being full of sugar', deciding to raise additional funds for their team and, in turn, Relay on the day of the relay itself setting up a table and selling cookies, chocolate, and gummy bears.

Since Sherry's second diagnosis, Ivy says the family has been supportive of sharing her family's struggle once again and the support from friends, family, and the community, has been overwhelming.

'At previous relays Sherry was always the survivor and not in actual treatment,' says Ivy. 'Each year Relay starts with a Survivor lap. Our tradition on our team is Sherry starts the first lap by herself and her husband and children then join her, then her parents, and by the end of the first lap the entire team is out on the track with her. That is one of my favourite parts because it recognizes

Sherry in her spirit and her strength, but also all the survivors.

?There are a lot of children who attend as survivors, so there is not a dry eye. It is such a powerful thing to see every age group from a child who is being pushed in a stroller by a proud parent, who is the child of a survivor, to maybe an ageing parent who needs assistance to walk around the track. Or there are the people who were told their numbers were up, yet are still there years later.?

Another personal highlight are the luminaries lit and lining the track representing individuals who have been effected by cancer. Ivy's own tradition, when she is starting to feel fatigued, is to dedicate each lap to an individual whose names are etched on the glowing paper bags. She reads the names of the people to herself as she goes around the track as a quiet reminder of why she is doing the all-night event.

?It's a very peaceful experience to be out on the track,? she says.

More raucous, however, will be Aurora's Council Chamber on Friday when Ms. Henriksen opens up the sealed envelopes to find out which one of her staff mates has the winning bid to make her own hair a (temporary) thing of the past. Envelopes have been rolling in and as her co-workers have spoken of their somewhat elaborate plans for Ivy's scalp, it has not only revealed the generous side of her co-workers but also unexpected creative streaks.

?My work environment has been my support with this piece mainly because of with distance, there is not a lot I can do on a daily basis, but I have support here, people have shared the own stories, and we have staff members who are survivors. There is encouragement there that she has fought it once and she will be able to fight it again, and just people coming out of the woodwork to say, 'this is an awesome thing you're doing.'

?A lot of people think I am a bit nuts for shaving my head, but it is hair and it will grow back, and it is just me taking a leap of faith. It is a reminder to people that we are all touched by it in some way.?

Aurora's Relay for Life gets underway this Friday at 7 p.m. running through the night on the Magna Campus just off Wellington Street East. For more information, visit www.relayforlife.ca.