

Aurora High students exceed \$50,000 fundraising goal



By Brock Weir

“If you ever saw the movie Face/Off with John Travolta, that’s what they did to me.”

Through his cancer battle, which started as skin cancer and rapidly moved towards his brain, Steve Raskin says he had to have his face removed four times and rebuilt with material from other parts of his body.

“Every Thursday was another challenge,” he said. “If you made it through that one, you waited until the next one.”

And made it through he did – but five years cancer free, May 26 was a special Thursday. He was joined by his partner, Lisa Wolfman, and their daughter Benji, on the back field of Aurora High School for the second-annual student-organized Relay For Life, benefiting the Canadian Cancer Society.

Although the event, which ran from 11 a.m. to 11 p.m. got off to a slightly soggy start, the soggiessness gave way to some sweltering sun as over 400 students took part in what they billed as “a party with a purpose.”

More than doubling their participation over last year, they handily exceeded their once-lofty fundraising goal of \$50,000.

“The spirit of all our committee members and the sense of community members we have was carried onto this year, was enhanced, and we have grown a lot,” said committee member Chen Lieu shortly after the kick-off ceremony. “This year, we have 430 participants and it was 131 last year, so were struggling a lot with finding activities to do, planning with meals, and stuff.”

There was certainly no shortage of activities, students being kept busy with yoga, Zumba, inflatable obstacle courses, and even watermelon eating contests.

“We are just really trying to cater to the different genders and cultures we have,” said Chen. “What made the difference this year [in participation and fundraising numbers] is more entries. Once people see this event, they fall in love. As soon as people walk out onto the field, hear the music and see people walking around, it just entices them.”

Steve was joined by Lisa in leading the Survivor’s Lap. An ovarian cancer survivor of over 12 years, she said when she was asked by Benji to take part, she just couldn’t say no to what turned out to be her very first Relay for Life event.

“Thank God I am alive and I can do this for those who are suffering,” she said, noting when she began her journey they were well into the process of adopting their daughter. “I just had a new baby and another one was on the way, you do what you have to do with baby steps. It’s a long journey to take with one step forward every day. You set a goal and stick with it; not huge goals, like reading a book every day. I was in school, so I wanted to finish one essay at a time. That was my goal: moving forward one foot at a time and look on the bright side. Don’t look at anything negative, just move forward.”

A similar view was offered by Heather Miller, a former teacher at Aurora High School who first battled breast cancer over 30 years

ago. Her key piece of advice, she said, is setting goals, taking things one day at a time, and trying not to look too far into the future.

'One of the things about having cancer is it really helps you to sharpen your awareness of what's really important and that has been a benefit for me,' she said. 'It has made me focus more on the positive. [After 30 years] I am still surviving and I think that might be encouraging.'

New members of the Aurora High School community also took part, including staff member Susan Cadorette, who recently came back to work after undertaking her own battle with breast cancer.

'Because it is with the kids who are at my school, this is very meaningful,' she said. 'They have such high energy, they are a lot of fun, and they have raised a huge amount of money today. I am very proud of them even though I don't know them very well yet! I think this is a great lesson for them giving back to the community as well.'

'It is wonderful for people to say, 'Let me know what I can do to help.' It is great to say, but quite often the person going through it is not brave enough to ask, doesn't know how to ask, or doesn't know what they need. Show up at the door with food, phone even if you think they are going to be too tired, just make the phone call, even if you think you are imposing. I found when I was going through it, and I was in a bad funk, someone called, had me laughing and that was exactly what I needed that day.'