

Relay for Life has personal meaning for Renaissance community



By Brock Weir

Emma Kocsis is carrying the baton for her mother.

Having lost her mother to cancer in 2013, the ESC Renaissance student was eager to become involved in a cause that touched her family personally and just such an opportunity presented itself this year as the southwest Aurora school decided to spearhead their very own Relay for Life.

Each year, the French Catholic school's Pastoral team has organized events to help the community, usually holding an annual fashion show with the proceeds going towards a different cause each year. This year, however, they decided to do something new and different, an activity with the potential to involve the entire Renaissance community.

"I have always done Relay for Life in the community and it has always been very important to me," says teacher Chantal Bertrand, who lost her own mother 16 years ago to cancer, spurring her to join a local team. "I have always had the dream of doing it in the school and this year we decided we would try and make that dream a reality."

They are doing more than making it a reality. Dividing themselves up into teams each charged with different tasks ranging from marketing to developing fun activities to keep everyone occupied and having fun during the 12-hour relay, the team initially set a fundraising target for themselves of \$21,000.

By this past Friday afternoon, they had well surpassed that goal, standing at \$25,835-and-counting for the Canadian Cancer Society, with a revised goal of \$30,000 with over a week to go.

"When we put [our fundraising thermometer] up at the beginning, a lot of students said, 'We're never going to reach \$21,000! There is no way we can do that,'" says Ms. Bertrand with a chuckle.

With their initial fundraising hurdle cleared, the students are energized to also carry that baton across the \$30,000 line by the time they begin the Relay next Friday, June 2, at 11 a.m.

"We made an Instagram account for Relay," says student Chloe Ruest, Captain of Marketing for Renaissance's Relay for Life. "We have a new person [featured] every holding up a sign saying, 'I am participating in Relay because?' and I put in the caption on why and their reasoning is either to raise awareness or because a family member has been impacted by cancer."

There are few people in the Renaissance community and the wider local community for that matter whose lives have not been touched by cancer in some way and, of course, the students leading the June 2 Relay are no exception.

"Everyone can say they know someone who has been affected by cancer, so we really know how to incorporate the parts where we're going to have fun, but these are the reasons why we're doing it and the whole goal of why we are doing it," says Emma.

Adds Stephane Arcand, Captain of the Ceremony Committee, "It is such an important cause, especially since the Cancer Society has made so much progress already. I think it is important for our school to find a way to unite because it is a fun activity that unites us

and it is always good to have more and more activities that unite the school. Not all the students like to participate in events, so I feel this is a good opportunity for the students to come together and really contribute to something that is important.?

Beyond the Relay itself, the students will facilitate a number of fun activities to not only keep spirits high during the 12-hour event, but also keep those all-important fundraising dollars rolling in. Among the activities on tap are a students vs. teachers basketball game, yoga sessions, an RV for gaming, an RV transformed into a photo booth, an on-site ice cream truck, fundraising head-shaving, and the creation of a "Mural of Dreams" which students will paint throughout the day, becoming a permanent fixture in the halls of Renaissance.

Each Relay, regardless of location, always begins with a Survivors' Lap for those who have beaten the disease and those who are in remission. While the bulk of the day's activities are open to the school community for security reasons, students invite all survivors to come and participate in the opening lap.

If you or someone you know might be interested in participating in the Survivors Lap, or if you are a business who would like to help sponsor the Relay, contact Ms. Bertrand at cbertrand@cscmonavenir.ca.

"It is about coming together as a team, as a community, as a school and [the students] being able to make a difference in the world," says Ms. Bertrand. "It is beyond just the community here in Aurora, it goes way beyond. If they can see their actions can actually make a difference maybe it is going to motivate them, once they leave this school, to make a difference and get involved in stuff as they get older and decide what they want to do with their lives and always get involved with causes that are close to their heart."

To support Renaissance's Relay for Life, visit www.relayforlife.ca/renaissance.