

"Superheroes" take victory lap at Relay



By Brock Weir

They came to honour their mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers, wives, husbands, and everyone they knew who had been touched by cancer.

But when hundreds descended on the Magna campus on Friday's Relay for Life, whoever they were walking for, they were walking for the "superheroes" among us.

For Lori Futterer, stories of typical superheroes often follow familiar paths. There is the trope of an ordinary person doing extraordinary things, she said, as well as the standard plot of being put into a world they find difficult to navigate and understand. Wherever they are, however, they learn to harness their power and fight.

"In traditional superhero stories, it is typically one superhero saving a village," she said. "In my particular story, it is about a village of superheroes saving one."

Ms. Futterer had many of her superheroes in tow as she took to the stage as this year's Honourary Survivor. A member of the Circle of Sisters team, her supporters included her family and friends, who banded together when this self-described "typical hockey mom" was diagnosed with breast cancer at 37. Told following her double mastectomy that she should expect her cancer journey to take a year off her life, she decided to make the most out of it.

"It is difficult to do something like that alone, so I needed some help," she said. "Enter into the story my own personal brand of heroes, my Circle of Sisters. These women did things like sneak wine into the hospital following my surgeries, throwing a party for me to shave my head before the medicine made it all fall out. They kept me active and exercising - a lot of miles in my running shoes, board games to chemotherapy treatments, late night phone calls and slumber parties, these women were up to the task.

"These superheroes had powers of compassion and kindness."

Her superheroes also extended to her family, hailing her husband Casey for changing his work life to be able to spend more time with her as she went through her journey, to her children who grew physically and in personality as the family banded together.

"I am grateful that my 16 year old son is growing into a very compassionate adult because of what he had to do when he was 11 to

help his mother," she said. "I am grateful that my 14 year old son will never be too old to hug his mum because at 9 that is all he knew how to do to make me feel better and he has carried that through to his teenage years. I am grateful for my daughter who at six years old found a deep faith and really discovered the power of prayer. At 11, she continues to tap into that faith to navigate her life and I think, what a wonderful gift."

After releasing ceremonial doves, Ms. Futterer was joined by her family, and then her Circle of Sisters, on the Survivor's Lap, the traditional start of the Relay itself. From there, teams from across Aurora and beyond, including several teams from Aurora High School, Dr. G.W. Williams Secondary School, and St. Maximilian Kolbe Catholic High School, kept their spirits up, and their feet active on the track, pulling an all-nighter to celebrate, reflect and remember.

"Cancer does not stop for nighttime," said AHS student Krista Camick. "The light and the darkness of day parallel the physical effects, emotions and the mental state of the cancer patient while they are undergoing treatment. The relay begins when the sun is setting. This symbolises the time that the person is diagnosed with cancer. The day is getting darker, which represents the cancer patient's state of mind as they feel that their life is coming to an end. As the evening goes on, it gets colder and darker, just as the emotions of a cancer patient do.

"At 1 a.m., it represents the time that a cancer patient starts treatment. They become exhausted, some not wanting to go on, ready to give up. As a participant, you have been walking around this track all night. Maybe you are sick, maybe you are tired, but you cannot stop. Just like a cancer patient, you may not give up. Around 4 or 5 a.m. symbolizes the coming to an end of the treatment for the cancer patient. They are more exhausted than ever but they know they will make it.

"They see the light at the end of the tunnel and they know that they will go on. The morning light brings new day full of light and excitement for new beginnings for the cancer patient. As a participant, you will feel the brightness of the morning and know the end of the relay is close. As you leave, think of the cancer patient leaving their last treatment, just as you are emotionally and physically drained, so is that person. There is hope in the new day."