



Relay for Life: Wood River hosts all-day cancer fundraiser

by Cory Davenport, Contributing Writer
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WOOD RIVER - For the past 20 years, the River Bend chapter of **Relay for Life** has raised large sums for cancer research.

The total sum of that money raised has reached \$1.6 million, **River Bend Relay for Life Co-Lead David Watts** said. The fundraising is done by individuals and organizations, and culminates at the Relay for Life all-day walkathon, which was held at the track at **East Alton Wood River High School** Saturday. During the 12-hour event, teams host fundraisers and walk around the track, leading to the Luminaria event at 9 p. m.

Throughout the Luminaria, the names of people who are currently fighting cancer, or have lost their battle are read aloud by those who are walking for them. Watts said approximately 300 bags have been purchased for the event-one bag for each name.

"It's the most emotional part of the day," Watts said. "It's the entire reason we do it."



Previous to the walkathon, Watts said more than \$60,000 was raised for the 2016 event. He said the goal was \$82,000. Watts believed the relay would reach that goal, partially due to a baseball tournament being held Saturday in honor of Relay for Life. The money raised goes to the **American Cancer Society** for cancer research and benefit programs for those suffering with cancer as well as those who have survived their battles.

Major fundraisers, **Team Imagine**, began when **Evelyn Haynes** was diagnosed with lung cancer. Her husband, **Jim Haynes**, promised God he would do everything he could to defeat lung cancer if he could just share more time with his wife. After raising as much as \$150,000 for cancer research, Jim Haynes passed away, but Evelyn Haynes remains alive and healthy.

Team Imagine member Lisa Dailey said the team has raised approximately \$7,000 previous to the walkathon. Watts said the team is a consistent fundraiser who returns each year to contribute to the cause.

"We have dinners at **Los Tres Amigos** every third Wednesday," Dailey said. "We also stand outside of Wal-Mart and ask people for donations."

Another team, **Rolling for a Cure**, is sponsored by **Joseph and Gina Geison**. Joseph Geison works for **Drake Tire**, and the team name is derived from tires.

"We called it Rolling for a Cure, because tires roll," Gina Geison said, laughing.



Gina Geison's father, **Ed Hall**, died from lymph cancer in 2001. Her sister, **Tina Price**, received a daunting diagnosis for the often fatal pancreatic cancer three years ago, but has since gone into remission.

Rolling for a Cure contains Gina and Joseph Geison as well as **Caleb, Andrea and Courtney Geison** and **Emily Eckston**. Their team had a sucker pull fundraiser for 10 cents.

Watts said the event has grown from a nationwide to a worldwide events, with 5,000 communities across North America, Europe and Africa participating in Relay for Life events.