

Relay For Life of Riverbend Welcomes New Event Chair

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(Wood River, IL) – Relay For Life is a fun event, but there is always some heartache involved as participants recall loved ones who have lost the battle against cancer. Tracy Driver, the new event chairman for the Relay For Life of Riverbend, is no exception.

Driver, 40, of Hartford, lost her husband, Charles “Kelly” Driver, to cancer on June 30, 2009. That was only a few days after last year’s Relay and Tracy was a member of the Olin T-500 team – but she was unable to attend since Kelly was so sick.

Things moved quickly after that.

“Shortly after my husband’s death I was approached by the former Olin T-500 Captain, Rhonda Keeney, about taking over her position,” Driver said. “I agreed that I would do it. She then informed me that there was a big meeting that I really needed to attend. It changed my perspective.”

Driver began to learn more about all of the the services provided by the American Cancer Society. That’s when she decided she wanted to become even more involved to help make a difference. David Watts, who was the event chair for the Riverbend event the past two years, remains on the committee but a new event chair was needed.

“In talking with Tracy, she was really enthusiastic and said we could put her wherever she was needed,” says Mandie Sidener, the ACS staff partner for the Riverbend event. “We talked a little more and she agreed to be the event chair. She’s the right person for the job. Tracy is motivated and is already working on ideas for this year’s Relay.”

This year’s Relay For Life of Riverbend will be from 6 p.m. to 6 a.m. June 25-26 at the

East Alton-Wood River High School football field. The theme is “Cancer Never Takes a Holiday,” and teams are encouraged to adopt the holiday of their choice for their campsite theme.

Driver had worked with her future husband at Olin for many years, but it wasn't until they got together outside of work that a relationship began to develop. But it wasn't long before Kelly began experiencing symptoms where he was unable to communicate. An MRI eventually found lung cancer with brain metastasis.

"We were going to be married in May 2009 but we moved it up (to July 2008) because of Olin's early retirement program," Tracy said. "He was OK for a while, but he had a seizure in March 2009 and they found two more nodules in his brain. It was downhill from there."

From tragedy comes hope, however.

"Had I known all the things that ACS provided, I might not have felt so alone at the time," Tracy said. "I could have called and talked to their 24-hour support line. We could have had help with transportation instead of a family member taking time off work to take us to St. Louis everyday. I want people to know where to go for help so that nobody ever feels alone like I did. When Kelly's illness became overwhelming, I needed someone to talk to. I was able to talk to family and friends some, but Kelly didn't like me telling people all the things happening to him, so it made it difficult to speak of his illness. So many nights as he slept, I would just cry, not knowing what to do for him or what to say to him."

This year's Relay For Life of Riverbend has a goal of \$110,000, 46 teams and 180 survivors attending. Teams are still being formed and Luminaria to honor loved ones are available for a donation. For more information on how to become involved in Relay for Life of Riverbend, please visit www.relayforliferiverbend.com or call the American Cancer Society at 1-800-227-2345, or e-mail Event/ACS staff partner Mandie Sidener at Text @RB to 618-202-4618 to sign up for Text Alerts from RiverBender!