



Hundreds of Chattanooga Residents Join Together to Support Oral Cancer Survivor and Raise Awareness

Chattanooga Walk Promotes Early Detection of Oral Cancer

NEWPORT BEACH, Calif., June 21 /PRNewswire-USNewswire/ -- Recently, oral cancer survivor Jeanna Richelson, organized the first Chattanooga Oral Cancer Awareness Walk, which raised donations for the Oral Cancer Foundation, and much needed awareness of a disease that too few Americans know about. According to the foundation's executive director Brian Hill, "I don't believe there has ever been an oral cancer walk that was this successful in its first year. This was an absolutely amazing effort by Jeanna and those who helped her make this possible."

Unlike other cancers we commonly hear about, oral cancer is a disease the majority of the public has heard little about, even though it has one of the highest death rates. Even with famous people who have passed away from this disease such as, Babe Ruth, Sigmund Freud, and George Harrison, it still receives little attention. While walks have become commonplace in many other diseases, raising awareness is no longer part of their function. By having a walk to raise awareness of oral cancer, it also raises awareness of risk factors that people might avoid, encourages simple inexpensive annual screenings, which will in turn reduce the death rate. Jamie O'Day, the treatment facilities coordinator for OCF commented, "This is a disease that in its early stages of development does not always produce symptoms that people might notice. Because of the insidious nature of oral cancer, annual screenings are essential to finding it as precancerous tissue changes, or at early stages of development when existing treatments are the most effective."

Chattanooga, Tennessee derives its name from a Cherokee word that means "big catch" and refers to the great fishing that can be found on the Tennessee River. And "big catch" is exactly what oral cancer awareness has landed in the way of Jeanna, a very determined Chattanooga-based engineer and oral cancer survivor, who is clearly on a mission.

Prior to the 2.5 mile walk, the hundreds of participants listened to inspirational stories by five oral cancer survivors: Jeanna; Amber Oliger; William Pressley; ABC Channel 9 TV personality Marcia Kling; and Charlie Poor, who drove from Atlanta to attend the event. The event's emcee was Cydney Miller, Mrs. Tennessee International, who is a loyal advocate of early cancer detection. Local sponsors of the walk included Bonfish Grill, the Tennessee Titans NFL football team, Chattanooga's Memorial Hospital, and BMW of Chattanooga who made very generous donations to ensure the events success. According to Jeanna, "Our walk was a wonderful opportunity for oral cancer survivors to meet, share stories and, most of all, learn that they're not alone." If anyone has a compelling story, it is Jeanna. A lifelong non-smoker, she was diagnosed with cancer in a lymph node on the right side of her neck in 2001. She underwent surgery to remove both the lymph node and her tonsils, where the disease had originally developed, hoping

that her cancer was behind her. But the disease was not going to become a thing of the past.

She married Robert Richelson in 2002, but six months after her wedding, she was diagnosed again with cancer at the base of her tongue. Determined to get the best care possible for his wife, Robert quit his job and took his new bride to the world-renowned M. D. Anderson Cancer Center in Houston, Texas for several months of treatment including six weeks of radiation therapy. The couple then returned to Chattanooga, where Jeanna received chemotherapy treatments for the remainder of the year. She was cancer-free for two years, but in early 2005 the cancer returned, this time in her thyroid. Jeanna and Robert headed back to M. D. Anderson for more radiation therapy. By the time the therapy was completed, Jeanna had been subjected to over 90 radiation treatments. Fortunately, they seem to have done the trick, as Jeanna has been cancer-free for four years.

In addition to an extremely supportive and caring husband, Jeanna has been blessed to have a very compassionate employer. "Both times I had to take a leave of absence to get treatment, Siskin Steel could not have been more understanding," said Jeanna. "And each time my treatment was completed, I was welcomed back to my old position as if nothing had happened."

Jeanna Richelson is fortunate to have a great husband and a great employer in her corner. And the cause of oral cancer awareness is fortunate to have Jeanna Richelson on its team. She is already planning her repeat of this event for 2011. "For all the things that the foundation does, from raising public awareness to sponsoring research, The Oral Cancer Foundation cannot fulfill our mission and reach our goals alone," said Megan Cannon the operations manager for OCF. "Relationships with survivors and volunteers like Jeanna are a core component to seeing our goals of reducing the incidence and death rates from cancers of the mouth. Their passion and altruism to help others through events such as this will touch thousands of others, and help fund OCF in these tough economic times for non-profits."

About the Oral Cancer Foundation: The Oral Cancer Foundation, founded by oral cancer survivor Brian R. Hill, is a non-profit 501(c)(3) public service charity that provides information, patient support, sponsorship of research, and advocacy related to this disease. Oral cancer is the largest group of those cancers which fall into the head and neck cancer category. Common names for it include such things as mouth cancer, tongue cancer, head and neck cancer, and throat cancer. It maintains a Web site at <http://www.oralcancer.org>, which receives millions of hits per month. At the forefront of this year's agenda, is the drive to promote solid awareness in the minds of the American public about the need to undergo an annual oral cancer screening, and an outreach to the dental community to provide this service as a matter of routine practice. There are two distinct pathways by which most people come to oral cancer. One is through the use of tobacco and alcohol, a long term historic problem and cause, and the other is through exposure to the [HPV-16 virus](#) (human papilloma virus version 16), a newly identified etiology, and the same one which is responsible for the vast majority of cervical cancers in women.

SOURCE Oral Cancer Foundation