



May 22, 2007, Plymouth, MA

Oral Cancer Awareness Lands On Plymouth Rock -or- “Walk The Rock” Rocks!

Passionate Hygienist Leads Effort to Raise Over \$15,000 To Fight Oral Cancer

As a dental hygienist for the past 5 years and a dental care practitioner for a total of 17 years, Laureen Brady has left little doubt that she is someone who cares about the well-being of others. So when her mother's best friend was diagnosed as terminally ill following two surgeries for oral cancer, it was completely in character for Laureen to commit to raising not only the friend's spirits but oral cancer awareness as well.

In mid-February, Laureen decided that she would stage a fund-raising oral cancer walk in her hometown of Plymouth, Massachusetts on April 15. Despite having only two months to organize the event largely on her own, Laureen somehow pulled off the first annual “Walk the Rock” event, and raised an impressive \$15,000 in the process. Laureen had heard about the Oral Cancer Walk in New York last year, and thought the same concept might work in her area as well. And she was certainly right, as the money she raised actually exceeded the money generated in the first year of the New York event.

“I got a list of all the dentists and hygienists in this part of the state and used flyers and word-of-mouth to ask for their support,” said Laureen, who is also co-chair of the Southeastern Massachusetts Dental Hygienists Association. “Many of the dentists made donations that I was able to use to pay for the t-shirts we made for the event. And the hygienists were the ones who rounded up most of the walkers.”

The success of “Walk the Rock” is all the more impressive considering that the weather did not exactly cooperate. “At 7:30 in the morning it was beautiful, but by the time we started the walk at 9:00 a real Nor'easter hit,” according to Laureen. Undaunted, 78 good-hearted walkers braved the rains and winds and raised over \$13,000. Almost \$2,000 more was raised a week later in a fund-raising poker tournament run by Laureen's father. Laureen is very thankful to her father, the 78 walkers, and all of the dentists and hygienists who supported her in various ways. She also credits Oral Cancer Foundation founder Brian Hill for his counsel. “I didn't think to contact Brian until fairly late in the process, but without his help there's no way I could have done this,” said Laureen. She has more than repaid the favor, as OCF plans to use the funds Laureen raised to distribute its “What You Need to Know about Oral Cancer” waiting room brochure to dental practices across the country. And what was the reaction from her mother's friend? “The event really put a smile on her face,” Laureen said. “That was really nice to see.”

Laureen is already thinking about next year's event. “I'm probably going to schedule it a little later in hopes of better weather,” she said, “maybe at the end of Oral Cancer Awareness Week.” She also hopes to be able to conduct oral cancer screenings at the event, and has begun working on getting qualified doctors to participate in the event. And she knows of at least one additional person who will be willing to help out. “I just got a letter from a woman at Harvard who heard about the event whose mother is a three- time oral cancer survivor,” said Laureen. “She said she wants to help out in any way she can.” Laureen also plans to talk to nearby Tufts Dental School to see if she can enlist their support in some way. And she

already has Brian Hill's commitment to again offer his support, but this time she will be sure to involve him from the start.

In retrospect, it seems outrageous to think that one individual, with only two months of planning time, no prior experience in fund-raising and no major organizational support behind her—not to mention a Nor'easter in front of her—could orchestrate an event that raises \$15,000. But when that individual has the passion, and the compassion, of a Laureen Brady, anything is possible.