



Nashville Hygienists partner with Oral Cancer Foundation to raise awareness of a silent killer.

Locals join together for second annual Oral Cancer walk and free screening event

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For the second year, the Nashville Area Dental Hygienists' Society (NADHS) has organized a successful walk to promote oral cancer awareness for a disease that affects so many, yet so few know about. Hundreds of Nashville locals gathered for the "Boot Scootin' for Oral Cancer Screening II" event that recently took place at Nashville's Centennial Park to raise disease awareness, and funds for the Non-Profit Oral Cancer Foundation (OCF).

The walk was lead by NADHS president Nicki Raines, who encouraged the organization to embrace the cause of oral cancer detection when she began her two-year presidential term. Her committee worked countless hours to ensure that the event would top last year's successful effort. Nicki's team was able to generate a local buzz for the walk through posters displayed at area Starbucks and Panera Bread stores, and via news releases sent to all local media. Local merchants rallied to support the event. Attendees were treated to coffee donated by Starbucks, water donated by Kroger's, and donuts donated by Krispy Kreme. Whole Foods, Trader Joe's, Wal-Mart and other Nashville area merchants came together to show their support by donating products for the auction and raffle that took place after the walk. Nashville superstars George Strait, Tim McGraw, Faith Hill and Brooks and Dunn were represented through autographed memorabilia, which brought their fans to the raffle.

The event also included three inspiring speakers. Two oral cancer survivors: Kathi Gill, a Georgia resident, and ShayLynn Grant, a 24 year old from Kentucky. The third speaker was Mrs. Tennessee International, Cydney Miller who is a loyal advocate of early cancer detection. In keeping with the theme of early detection, free oral cancer screenings were offered for all attendees. "The free screenings were an important component of the event" OCF founder, Brian Hill commented, "We urge the public to get screened annually. The dental community is the first line of defense against oral cancer, through the process of early discovery. Reducing the death rate from oral cancer is tangible, and doable in the immediate future."

Dr. Ross Kerr, an oral medicine specialist from New York University, who is an advisor to the foundation, commented on 24 year old survivor ShayLynn Grant. "Most people have a perception that this is a disease of older people who have spent a lifetime using tobacco, and finally develop the disease in their sixth or seventh decade of life. That is no longer completely accurate. With the Human Papilloma Virus #16 becoming an increasing cause of the disease, young non-smokers are the fastest growing segment of the oral cancer population". OCF operations manager, Megan Cannon added, "Oral Cancer is not a rare disease. It kills one person

every hour of everyday in the US, and 100 new cases of oral cancer will be diagnosed each day. These are staggering statistics, making these events so important, as awareness of the disease and its risk factors in the US population is so low. Clearly, Nicki Raines and the Nashville participants are doing their part to raise awareness on a local level, but their impact is so much greater. Through the funds received today, OCF will be able to disseminate information about risk factors, and do free screening events in parts of the US where disparities exist, and access to screening is either not available or cost prohibitive for those people." Oral cancer is the largest group of those cancers which fall into the head and neck cancer category. Common names for it include mouth cancer, tongue cancer, head and neck cancer and throat cancer.

The Oral Cancer Foundation, is a non-profit 501(c)(3) public service charity that provides information, patient support, sponsorship of research, and advocacy related to this disease. 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 awareness in the minds of the American public about the need to undergo an inexpensive, painless and quick annual screening, and an outreach to the dental community to provide this service as a matter of routine practice.