

Hugoton prepares for Relay For Life

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Cancer survivors begin their lap at the 2011 Stevens County Relay For Life in Hugoton. This year's event starts Friday night at the football field in Hugoton. L&T file photo/Robert Pierce

By ROBERT PIERCE

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In the mid-1980s, Dr. Gordy Klatt, a Tacoma, Wash., surgeon, wanted to enhance the income of

his local American Cancer Society office. He decided to personally raise money for the fight against cancer by doing something he enjoyed – running marathons.

In May 1985, Klatt spent a grueling 24 hours circling the track at Baker Stadium at the University of Puget Sound in Tacoma for more than 83 miles. Through the night, friends donated \$25 to run or walk 30 minutes with him.

Klatt raised \$27,000 to fight cancer that first year, and nearly 300 of his friends, family and patients watched as he ran and walked the course.

Klatt's 24 hours at Baker Stadium led to what is known today as the ACS' Relay For Life, and cancer survivors, family and friends will continue the tradition this Friday night at the Hugoton High School football field for this year's edition of the Stevens County event.



Area ACS staff partner Lisa Nelson said supper will start at 6 p.m. Friday, followed by local entertainment and many games and activities.

"There'll also be a flag football tournament going on," she said. "Opening ceremonies are at 7. The luminary ceremony starts at 10."

Nelson said the fundraising goal for this year's relay is \$31,000, after last year's event brought in \$39,000.

"We do not have our mini-relays at the school this year," she said of money-raising events leading up to this weekend. "We backed our goal down this year because they made \$10,000 last year for us. We've had a relay block party this year. We had our carnival. We had a Pink Out. We had a mini-relay at our nursing home at Pioneer Manor, which was really fun. We had a Main Street luminary service, which was really nice."

Nelson said Hugoton schools only have a mini-relay every other year, and this is an off year for that fundraiser. According to the national Relay For Life Web site, as of this morning, 13 teams and 95 participants had signed up for this year's Stevens County event, and nearly \$21,000 had already been raised.

Nelson will be helping out with Seward County's Relay For Life next month in Liberal, but after a few years working with Hugoton's relay, this will be her last time being in charge of Stevens County's event.

"I'm just going to be a relayer," she said. "I'm going to be a stay at home mom."

Nelson's son, Maverick, is now a sophomore at Hugoton High School, and the mother has simply decided she just wants to be home more with her son. This is Nelson's sixth relay season, and she spent part of that time as co-chairman of the Hugoton relay before becoming an ACS staff partner.

"I'll miss my co-workers and the relayers that have so much passion to find a cure for cancer," she said. "I will continue to relay here in Hugoton."