



Staten Island ACS chapter stages its Relay for Life Kickoff

by Staten Island Advance

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It was a pep rally to prepare people to celebrate, remember and fight back.

The Staten Island chapter of the American Cancer Society staged its Relay For Life Kickoff yesterday evening at the Kelleher Center on the campus of **St. John's University**, Grymes Hill.

Approximately 50 people sat at tables decorated with purple and white balloons, and purple tablecloths. Lawn signs saying "Join us in the fight against cancer" were lined up against the room's wall, free for people to take to spread the society's message.

"This is the preparatory event," said Alberta Brescia, Staten Island's regional vice president of the American Cancer Society. "The event itself is a celebration of survivorship and a remembrance of those we lost," she said, in respect of the main Relay For Life, which will be June 13 at Wagner College, Grymes Hill.

"Relay gives us an opportunity in the community to gather together in the fight to celebrate survivors and to remember," said Jim Pistilli, senior chair of Relay For Life on Staten Island. He has seen 26 family members succumb to cancer and has been volunteering for more than 35 years, six with the American Cancer Society.

He and Mrs. Brescia spoke to the crowd about methods of preparing for the June event. The duo also described the volunteer "teams," led by a team captain, and offered ideas to help teams find creative ways to raise funds.

Guy Ahearn, who lost his wife, Roseann, to cancer, sat at a table with close family members and two seniors from St. Peter's Boys High School.

Said Ahearn: "Survival. That's what it's all about. It takes many to do that, and that's what we're trying to do."

His group, led by team captain Stephanie Higgins, is preparing a huge neighborhood yard sale and a Texas hold'em tournament to raise money.

Miss Staten Island Melissa Robson sang "God Bless America," and other speakers included a mix of cancer survivors and fund-raisers.

One cancer survivor, Georganna Diaz, mentioned how the American Cancer Society helped her when she was diagnosed in 2002, and now she wants to extend the favor to others. "I was inspired to do the same," she said.

Folks interested in volunteering can contact the American Cancer Society at 718-987-8872, or visit <http://events.cancer.org/rflstatenislandny>.

Mrs. Brescia and Pistilli are hoping for banner results.

"Cancer never sleeps. Neither do we," said Mrs. Brescia.

"Until the fight is won," Pistilli chimed in.

