



Michele Jokinen, mjokinen@postbulletin.com

The Rev. Nick Mezacapa of Calvary Episcopal Church, and his wife, Edna, lead the Survivors' Victory Lap during the opening ceremony Friday of the 2009 Olmsted County American Cancer Society Relay for Life at University Center Rochester. Mezacapa, a prostate cancer survivor, is the 2009 Relay for Life Honorary Chair.

BENEFIT / RELAY FOR LIFE

Hundreds join fight against cancer

By Jeff Hansel

jhansel@postbulletin.com

Hundreds in Rochester participated in an overnight fundraising event for the American Cancer Society Friday night.

Teams camped out and took turns walking a track at the Olmsted County Relay for Life at Rochester Community and Technical College.

Scheduled events included the band Furious George, games, a luminary ceremony, a midnight pizza party, bingo, a 2 a.m. movie and breakfast at 7 a.m. Saturday morning.

Arvilla Boehm of Racine walked on a team with her grandson, a leukemia survivor.

"He's doing very good, and he's got a bunch of his classmates walking with him tonight," she said.

Ross Messick, a community relations worker for the American Cancer Society, estimated about 1,000 people turned out for opening ceremonies. More than 600 registered to walk.

"I'd like to see us hit \$170,000 tonight," he said. "I'm holding my breath."

Messick took his first turn on the lap that honors survivors Friday.

"I found out last September that I had Hodgkin's lymphoma," he said. He took chemotherapy and radiation and is feeling good.

"I have my health back. I'm cancer free," he said.

Relay for Life chair Tracy McCray marveled at progress made since her lymphoma diagnosis two decades ago.

"I actually got choked up tonight on the way here. ... In those 21 years it has changed so dramatically," she said.

Organizers touted a tent where volunteers who have never had cancer could sign up for the American Cancer Society's Cancer Prevention Study-3. Volunteers gave blood samples and filled out questionnaires about their exercise, eating and medication habits. Each year for the next 20 they'll be asked to fill out follow-up surveys, with the hope that researchers can learn genetic and environmental risk factors for cancer, and ways to prevent it.

Reporter Jeff Hansel covers health for the Post-Bulletin. Read his blog, *Pulse on Health*, at Postbulletin.com.

For more information about the study, go to Postbulletin.com/weblinks.