

Running for Life

by Virginia O'Keefe

A non-smoker, Cathi Reade of Virginia Beach had endured a cough for a year. Finally, she had a chest x-ray.

"On July 18, 2007, I was diagnosed with Stage IIIb lung cancer," she said, the date etched starkly in her mind. She also learned her odds of surviving lung cancer were slim. "Five percent of us have a chance of surviving five years. Scary," she said. Her right lung was removed and she underwent radiation and chemo therapy treatment.

Instead of hiding behind her fears, however, Cathi decided to reach out and help increase awareness of lung cancer, its treatment and cure. She responded to an ad in *The Virginia Beach Beacon* calling for volunteers to help in the upcoming 5th annual Race for Breath on Nov. 1, 2008.

RACE FOR BREATH

The Race for Breath traces its beginnings to the deaths of two women, Phyllis Emanuel Gilbert and Blakely G. Burke, who lost their lives, and breath, to lung cancer. Their daughters, Stacy Emanuel, Nicole Piette, and Kelly Burke Jennings, seeking consolation from people with similar losses, found each other online. Their process of healing led them to work together in an effort to educate the public and help fight this disease.

Eventually Stacy, Nicole, and Kelly founded Race for Breath, a 5K run/walk which supports the Lung Cancer Alliance (LCA), the only national non-profit organization dedicated to lung cancer. Since their first race in 2004, the organization has raised \$350,000.

This year the founders hope to generate \$100,000, but they knew they needed help. They called Cathi and asked if she would be the race director. Cathi was a natural for the job, having become a runner during a 20-year stint with the Marine Corps. She'd also been involved in various running events, including the Rock 'n' Roll Half Marathon.

The challenge of directing the race was daunting, especially in the wake of Cathi's lung cancer treatment. The job required her to provide sponsors, volunteers,

food, prizes, and set up the races. "Last year almost a thousand people participated," she explained.

Cathi feels her efforts are important, no matter the difficulty. "Breast cancer gets so much attention people think it's the number one killer," she said. "It's not. Lung cancer is number one."

A DEADLY CANCER

The Race for Breath is an attempt to turn around the belief that lung cancer only happens to those guilty of damaging their health through smoking. In fact, lung cancer is a deadly disease that affects smokers, past-smokers, and never-smokers like Cathi. According to the American Cancer Society, an estimated 160,000 people died from lung cancer in 2007. Lung cancer is the leading cause of cancer death in the United States and kills more people than breast, prostate, colon, liver, kidney, and melanoma cancers—combined. Over 60 percent of new cases are never smokers, or former smokers, many of whom quit years ago. And, the majority of lung cancers are diagnosed so late, the patients die within a year.

The number of people developing lung cancer who never smoked is climbing (think Dana Reeve). Unfortunately, low funding for research and the general lack of publicity about lung cancer may instill a false sense of security. Cathi hopes that knowledge about lung cancer, prevention, and highly effective treatment can reverse the high rate of mortality. She believes the Race for Breath, especially through the LCA, will help people become more aware of this dreadful disease.

According to LCA, only 16 percent of lung cancer cases are diagnosed at its earliest and most curable stage. If the public learned to recognize symptoms of lung cancer early enough, treatments would have a better chance to cure the disease. Part of the campaign is to explain the symptoms of lung cancer. The most common one is a persistent cough. Others are shortness of breath, fatigue, wheezing, pain in the shoulder, back or arm, weight loss or loss of appetite, hoarseness, swelling of the neck, or general pain.



Stacy Emanuel, Cathi Reade & Kelly Jennings are making a difference. (Courtesy photo)

Cathi warned that some people should be especially alert because they are at particular risk for lung cancer. Smoking, of course, is a major factor, but those who have been exposed to second-hand smoke are also candidates, as well as those who have been exposed to asbestos. A family history of lung cancer is another alert.

HOPE ON THE HORIZON

Hope lies on the horizon as long as funding to study lung cancer continues to become available through efforts like the Race for Breath. One recent heartening study offers real opportunity for a cure. A groundbreaking study published in *The New England Journal of Medicine* indicated that annual low dose CT screenings could detect lung cancer at its earliest stage. Early diagnosis is a lifesaver, as we have learned from breast cancer. Discovering lung cancer at Stage I could dramatically boost the survivor rate from its present low five-year level to an incredible 92 percent ten-year survival.

Even though lung cancer is the leading cause of cancer death, lung cancer research money is minimal. In fact, lung cancer research received less than 5 percent of the National Cancer Institute's budget in 2007. More shocking is that lung cancer received \$0 in 2007 from the Department of Defense, and \$0 from the Center for

Disease Control and Prevention. These three organizations are the major sources of funding for federal cancer research. The goal of Race for Breath is to make this lack of funding history.

Participants can choose from among a 5K Run, 5K Walk, 1 Mile Walk, and 1 Mile Kid's Fun Run. Who should participate? "Everyone," Cathi answered. "Some can roll out of bed and do them. Of course, lots of folks train because the races are competitive. Walking is getting huge and there are separate walk judges."

Cathi urges everyone to join the fight against lung cancer. "I am committed to raising awareness," she said, emphasizing how each person who enters the race helps make a difference.

Race for Breath founder Stacy Emanuel reminisced about her mother, how hard it was to lose her. "But she taught me that we have to help others and we have to fight this disease," she said. ■

• *The 5th Annual Race for Breath will be held Sat., Nov. 1, 2008, at 9 a.m. at 24th St. in Va. Beach. For more information, visit www.raceforbreath.active.com or call 757-717-8774.*

• *Lung Cancer Alliance: www.lungcanceralliance.org, www.screenforlungcancer.org, Ph. 202-463-2080*
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