

2012 'Magic of Relay' raises nearly \$30,000

Written by Holyoke Enterprise

Friday night, Aug. 24 was filled with magic as community members walked the track, celebrated with cancer survivors and raised funds for the American Cancer Society at the 2012 Phillips County Relay For Life.

The 12-hour "Magic of Relay" event kicked off at Phillips County Courthouse in Holyoke at 7 p.m. Friday evening, concluding at 7 a.m. Saturday morning with all those brave souls who stayed the entire night.



**Cancer survivor Clark Starkebaum and his pal enjoy their time during opening ceremony activities Friday night. □ □
—Photography By C Lee**

Last weekend's event was the finale to one year of hard work raising money, which will go to cancer research. This year, Phillips County raised nearly \$30,000.

Emcees Marcia Dalton and Marcus Kammer welcomed survivors, team members, volunteers and guests to the 11th annual Phillips County Relay, thanking them for their involvement.

Committee members, including co-chairs Sharon Greenman and Sherry Mari, were acknowledged for their dedication to the event. Mel and Betty Ocken were also recognized for

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their vision at the inaugural 2002 Relay For Life in the county.



Youngsters had a fun time Friday night, Aug. 24 at the annual Phillips County Relay For Life held at Phillips County Courthouse. Special guest Cooper Ballesterros, at right, is joined by some buddies for a photo op during dinner. —Photography By C Lee

Special guest Cooper Ballesterros definitely captured the hearts of everyone in attendance. This 3-year-old cancer survivor from Plainview, Texas gave people a different view of what it means to be a survivor.

Ballesterros' mom, Julie Ritter (niece of Holyoke's Sheila Robinson), and his stepdad, Brett Ritter, were there to explain just what the journey has been like since their son was diagnosed with rhabdoid sarcoma in June 2011.



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Special guest Cooper Ballesterros, center, is joined by his parents, Brett and Julie Ritter shortly after Julie gave a touching recap of Cooper's struggle with cancer. The 3-year-old youngster has been cancer free since August 2011.

—Photography By C Lee

Relay For Life is a chance to celebrate with cancer survivors as well as remember those who have lost the battle.

Cancer survivors and their caregivers started off the Relay, making their way around the track in a "Victory Lap." Leading the way was survivor Donna Lutze with granddaughter Janessa Lutze and survivor Bonnie Smith.



Cancer survivor Donna Lutze, at left, is joined by her granddaughter Janessa Lutze and cancer survivor Bonnie Smith as banner carriers during the survivor lap Friday night, Aug. 24 during the 11th annual Phillips County Relay For Life. —Photography By C Lee

Later in the evening, the track was lit with dozens of luminaria, a way for participants to remember those affected by cancer. Names were read in memory of those lost to cancer and in honor of cancer survivors, followed by a silent memory lap.

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