

Hope sweet Hope



Sue Allison smiles as she walks alongside Bob Solomon down Main Street for the survivor's lap while the crowd claps and cheers in support.

Lacy Garrison photos

Relay for Life continues mission in new location

BY LACY GARRISON
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(McMinnville, Tennessee)

The community came together in downtown McMinnville on Saturday to honor survivors, remember loved ones lost, and raise money to fight cancer at the 16th annual Relay for Life. Many local survivors gave passionate testimonies when asked what this event means to them.

"It's emotional to me because we're here," said Gretchen Rhea while fighting back tears. "I've got a brother-in-law who has just been diagnosed and I lost a good friend this morning to it. We have another friend that his daughter, Katelyn Smith, is now going through it and she just graduated from high school. I don't mind it so much for myself, someone older, but these young people, you hate to see them get it with their whole life ahead of them. It's heartbreaking."

After leaving her handprint on the 2018 Survivor Sheet, 21-year cancer survivor Lisa Bridges smiled while watching the crowd and competing teams participate in Name that Tune on stage.

"It's always emotional for me to see the support the people walking receive from people watching," said Bridges. "There is so much love, support and faith and it makes all the difference. I give all the credit to God."

Although many people were saddened by the absence of lost loved ones, the atmosphere was one filled with hope, especially as men, women and children took their survivor's lap down Main Street. Katy Perry's song "Roar" could be heard in the background with many singing along loudly "I got the eye of the tiger, a fighter, dancing through the fire 'cause I am a champion and you're gonna hear me roar."

Many people were happy about the change in venue from Nunley Stadium, including survivor Denise Rhea and her father Rodney Reynolds, who lost his wife to cancer in June 2009.

"I love having it here downtown," said Rhea. "I think it allows us to mix and mingle in different places whereas at the stadium it was just going around the track. For me, Relay for Life ... just being able to see everybody, being able to see we're making progress with research and this is just affirmation to that."

Event organizer Carla Savage was pleased with this year's turnout and thinks the change in location was beneficial.

"It was a breath of fresh air and we had a lot of good comments," said Savage. "It was an easier walk for the survivors not having to climb the bleachers and the games and food were easier to access."

So far, this year's Relay for Life has raised \$110,000 with money still coming in, according to Savage.



Gretchen Rhea finds her name on last year's survivor sheet. "I have been blessed," said Rhea looking at her purple handprint. "They just found mine in time and I'm thankful they discovered it when they did."



Seven-month-old Sloan Pearsall matches her pink balloon animal made by "The Balloon Dude," aka Justin Reed.



Blood Assurance had a truck parked in front of Regions Bank and had received 20 units at a blood drive during Relay for Life. Kelsie Hayes is pictured giving blood and said it is a simple thing to do, but can make a big difference in the lives of others.



Ella Moses holds her 4-year-old daughter Nylah Hickey, who smiles after getting a magenta butterfly painted on her cheek. "I'm a four-year survivor," said Moses. "I was invited by a friend and came from Rockvale to be a part of McMinnville's Relay for Life."

Justin Reed, otherwise known as "The Balloon Dude," makes 3-year-old Bryce McGee a blue balloon animal at Relay for Life.

