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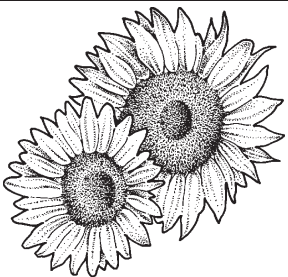
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Ashley Kear on stage as a Hero of Hope at the American Cancer Society Relay for Life Leadership Summit held in September in Dallas. She showed her fighting spirit against cancer.

Sherman County Relay for Life wages war, earns honors

By Pat Schiefen

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Sherman County was represented by Ashley Kear and Jessica Kannady at the American Cancer Society Relay for Life Leadership Summit on Friday to Monday, Sept. 12 to 15 in Dallas. Sherman County won the Spirit of Relay - Fight Back Award and Kear was a Hero of Hope all weekend.

Kear is one of two survivors chosen to be a Hero of Hope in the state of Kansas. She was nominated by Sherman County Relay for Life committee. In July she went to Dallas to get training to talk about cancer prevention, being a survivor and resources the society provides.

She said when you survive cancer it gives you the greatest appreciation of life.

Kear had a lump on her neck four years ago, which she kept feeling when she scratched an itch. She had a needle biopsy, which came back as non-cancerous, but she felt tired all the time and didn't have the energy she used to.

She went to another doctor and had three biopsies, which also came back as non-cancerous. Then she went to Dr. Alfred Carr, an ear, nose, throat specialist from Denver, thinking she had an ear problem. Kear said he told her the lump concerned him, and he recommended a doctor he knew could remove it.

"I had been steered away from removing it," she said. "I was warned that if I had it removed, it would spread quickly, but Dr. Carr said he had a friend who could remove it."

She had the lump removed in Longmont, Colo., and the day before her 25th birthday was diagnosed with stage 2 Hodgkins Lymphoma.

"I was at stage 2," she said; "there are four stages."

She then had chemotherapy every other week for six months and had contrast scans, where she was injected with radiation and then doctors looked to see if the cancer was shrinking.

In six months, the cancer was gone, she said, adding she had lost all her hair and had other side effects from treatment, including dark spots on her skin called burns, but she knows it could have been worse.

"Hair comes back," Kear said. "I'm still alive. You hear about so many who lose the battle with cancer."

One who did was Kear's husband's grandmother, who had the same type of cancer and is the reason she became involved in Relay for Life six years ago. Her mother-in-law wanted to do the relay in honor of her mother, and Kear decided to join her.

"Two years later," Kear said, "I was

surprised to be walking the survivor lap. It was so surreal."

"Twenty years ago people died from the type of cancer I had," she said. "Now, thanks to the American Cancer Society, research and technology has improved, and it is possible to beat it."

Also, she said, the society is one of few charities that put on their web site where all their money goes. She recommends calling the society's toll-free, 24-hour hotline at (800) ACS-2345 or visiting the web site at www.relayforlife.org to find out more.

And she encourages prevention and early detection.

"I encourage people to go to their doctor for check ups," she said. "Many people think cancer happens to old people, but it doesn't discriminate."

One in three people will be diagnosed with cancer during their life, she said; money raised at Relay saves lives by paying for research, early detection and prevention education, advocacy efforts and patient services.

Kear said she appreciates what the society has accomplished in improving the resources available. When someone has cancer and is fighting for their life, she said, the last thing they need is to be worried about how to afford a wig, how to get to their doctor appointments and how to pay for a hotel afterward.

Kear said she will continue to work with the society because wants to help to find

a cure.

"I hope my kids' kids don't even know that word," she said.

The Summit awards recognizes the top relays in the High Plains Division which includes Guam, Hawaii, Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska, Oklahoma and Texas. This is the second time the Sherman County relay has won the award. The award was based on the per capita of the event and volunteer involvement. Even with rain making the event in Goodland an evening affair instead of all night it raised \$50,000 and had 50 survivors participate. The Sherman County relay won the award in 2006.

"The funds raised through our Relay For Life events enable us to continue our investment in the fight against cancer through research, education, advocacy and services to patients," added Kannady, relay chair volunteer. "Due to the generosity of our volunteers and donors, the money raised by Relay For Life participants goes directly to the American Cancer Society's lifesaving programs."

Information about how to form a team, becoming a committee member, or become involved in Relay For Life can be obtained calling Kannady at (785) 890-3285.

gEveryone worked extremely hard to make this Relay For Life event successful, and this award is proof that their work paid off. h said Jennifer Van Eaton, Community Manager - Development for the American Cancer Society who lives in Colby.



Kear (above) received flowers from the organizing committee of Sherman County Relay for Life on being selected as a Hero of Hope for Kansas at the relay held on Friday, Aug. 15. Kear (right) walking in the survivor's lap in the relay.

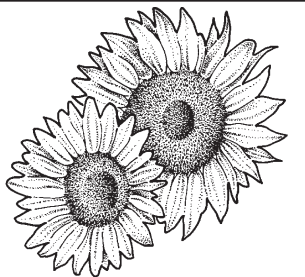
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