

Small College Raises Big Money for Cancer Research

Lake Region State College (LRSC) in Devils Lake, North Dakota, declares in its motto a priority to “enhance lives and community vitality through quality education,” and the college lives its motto every day in many ways. For the past three years, staff and faculty at LRSC have led a community-wide effort to raise funds for cancer research and to support families impacted by the disease.

In 2008, LRSC welcomed a new president and “first lady.” As the president’s wife settled into the campus community and immersed herself in the campus culture, her passion for volunteerism quickly became apparent. Not long after her arrival, the president’s wife approached HR staff and others on campus about holding a fundraiser for the American Cancer Society. They chose to focus on building a campus-wide team to participate in the American Cancer Society’s Relay for Life program, a national fundraiser that supports cancer research. From a core group of five committed individuals in 2009, the Team Against Cancer (TAC), as it came to be known, grew steadily over the next three years to its current size of about 30 volunteer members.

“For more than three years, this group of committed volunteers has poured its energy into numerous fundraising projects conducted throughout the year and

has become one of our community’s top Relay for Life fundraisers,” says LRSC Vice President for Advancement Laurel Goulding. Since 2009, the group has raised more than \$17,000 for the American Cancer Society, and TAC team efforts have helped North Dakota’s Lake Region Relay for Life event secure its place as one of the nation’s top fundraising communities when measured by gifts per capita. The TAC team’s work has been widely embraced by the campus community and the greater Lake Region community. Over the past three years, more than 3,000 people have been involved in TAC-sponsored events. “This is a major accomplishment for a group operating on the campus of a small, rural community college with fewer than 400 resident students in a town of only 7,000 people,” says Goulding.

TAC has generated participation and support through many creative fundraising projects, including “Pink Night,” where LRSC’s basketball team, its coaches and spectators wear pink to a game and purchase “pink” (cancer society) merchandise, raffle tickets and baked goods; Run For Your Life, a pay-to-participate 5K fun run/walk; fee-based Zumba classes; the wildly popular Death by Chocolate event, where members of the campus community can purchase donated chocolate treats; Shoot for a Cure, which allows participants to pay to participate in a shotgun/bow-and-arrow target shooting experience;



Lake Region State College's inaugural Relay for Life team.

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luminary sales to honor and remember victims of cancer; Hearts for Halle, a Valentine balloon/gift basket sale to raise funds for a campus employee suffering from cancer; and more.

In addition, TAC volunteers choose a theme and organize a campsite for the Relay for Life walk/vigil held each June. Participants dress in costumes coordinated with the campsite décor and spend the night walking in relays with other teams on a pathway lit with luminaries named for cancer victims and survivors. Many LRSC students, staff and faculty members participate in the Relay for Life event each year, and most recruit friends and family members to walk as well. The funds collected by TAC throughout the year are turned over to the national Relay for Life/American Cancer Society organization or used for local cancer support projects.

In addition to supporting the national Relay for Life organization, TAC volunteers launched a new project in 2011 in the form of a gift solicitation initiative for children hospitalized for cancer treatment. The team encouraged the campus to forego its annual gift exchange tradition and focus instead on providing gifts for children and families involved with the oncology unit of the local children's hospital. LRSC students and friends of the college were invited to join staff and faculty in the gift gathering project. Altogether, 400 gift items were collected and used to create 138 gift packages for children receiving cancer treatment.

"We are very fortunate to have such compassionate, caring people at LRSC and the surrounding communities," says Goulding. "Although our TAC volunteers coordinate and lead these fundraising efforts, our staff, faculty, students and their families and friends are the reason we are as successful as we are every year. Their generosity and thoughtfulness are inspiring." 

Lake Region State College was a nominee for CUPA-HR's 2012 Community Service and Outreach Award.

The Role of HR

Lake Region State College's human resources department plays a lead role in the school's community service and outreach efforts. The department served as the catalyst for the college's involvement in fundraising for the American Cancer Society, and HR staff members provide leadership for activities selected by the campus TAC team.

The department also actively promotes TAC projects through campus communication channels and public media and encourages involvement of campus personnel, students and friends of the college. Additionally, the department has leveraged the TAC activities to encourage healthy behavior among faculty and staff.

"We recognize that research links many kinds of cancer to lifestyle choices," says Corry Kenner, LRSC's vice president for administrative services. "To that end, in addition to supporting the TAC team and its projects, we've also begun communicating regularly with the LRSC workforce about the importance of accessing and utilizing available healthcare resources, living healthy lifestyles and supporting each other in making healthy life choices."