

Successful weekend to end all women's cancers

BY JILL HUDSON
OTTAWA

One thousand people participated in the fifth annual Weekend to End Women's Cancers in Ottawa on Saturday, June 5 and Sunday, June 6.

According to the Ottawa Regional Cancer Foundation, \$2.1 million was raised. More than 700 people walked the 60-kilometre trek throughout Ottawa and into Gatineau — some with cancer, some in remission and others as a tribute to somebody they know who has cancer. Each walker had to raise at least \$2,000 in order to participate, but some raised substantially more.

Despite the seriousness of the topic, there was an atmosphere of celebration. At the first rest stop called "Peace and Love in the 1960s" the crew dressed in '60s garb. Walkers arrived to heroes' welcomes, cheers, bubbles in the air and the flurry of cameras taking their pictures.

The most successful fundraiser of the walk, Sue Keeler, is a two-time cancer survivor. This is the second year in a row she has been the highest biller. This year, she raised more than \$28,000.

"I am a proud walker, for the third year in a row, for the Shoppers Drug Mart Weekend to End Women's



Corinne Guy-Teichert with her friend Maryele Gautier. Ms. Gautier was diagnosed with breast cancer in February.

Cancer," Ms. Keeler said. "I am very proud of our team, the Winchester Hospital

Heelers. We raised more than \$144,000. We are the top fundraisers again this year."

There are plenty of reasons for Ms. Wheeler to walk. She has beaten cancer twice. Her sister, who was diagnosed with cancer last January, is now recovering from it. Her mother died of cancer 35 years ago. And, last year, her stepmother's mom died of bone cancer. Plus, she wants to protect her daughters and granddaughters from the disease.

Ms. Keeler was first diagnosed with breast cancer seven years ago. The first chemo was called "The Red Devil," which made her pee red and lose her hair and taste buds. The second one is the "Taxiteer." For that treatment she was on steroids and, when she came off of them, she had no muscles in her legs and she had to use a walker for the first three weeks.

"That wasn't so much fun. I am all through it again," she said. "My sister is healing from the same thing, breast cancer. She had both breasts removed in August. She is just recuperating from chemotherapy and radiation, and she is now walking around without a wig or a

handkerchief. Thanks to the money that we raised and the support that we have I am here and healthy and so is my sister. That's what it's all about: survivorhood."

Ms. Keeler added that she is grateful.

"I really want to thank everyone who supported us," she said. "All of us, everybody who is doing the walk. I am proof that it is doing a lot of good. If it wasn't for the treatments that I did get and the wonderful nurses and doctors I may not be here today. Just like my mom. There weren't walkers back then. There weren't support groups. Even the medication that she needed to beat the damn disease. Just get rid of it. Just throw it away."

Marlene Pyper, another Heeler, is walking for her mother who has survived breast cancer, went through radiation and is two years cancer-free. In fact, her mother met her at all the rest stops wearing a T-shirt with Marlene's picture on it. She said she has made friends for life being part of the Heelers.

Marlene Quintin of the Heelers worked at Pit Stop 1 at Survivor Park in Ottawa. The theme of the rest station was "Peace and Love in the 1960s." Her daughter helped out on the crew and Ms. Quintin hopes she will never have to worry about cancer. Mrs. Quintin said that 75% of the money the Winchester Heelers raise goes back to the Winchester Hospital oncology unit to pay for the digital mammography machine.

Elaine Sarazin, another Heeler, also opted to be a crew member. She is now 19 months in remission and her medication creates issues for her joints and her right ankle is weak. She had inflammatory breast cancer which is a rare and

aggressive cancer. Thanks to advancement in medical protocol, research and development she is alive today.

"So, for me it's critical that people participate in walks like this, to raise money and raise awareness in the community," Ms. Sarazin said. "Just on a personal level it's so heartwarming to be with all of this positive energy. We conspire to work together in our fight against cancer; but to do it with fun. Obviously it is a serious thing but we have a lot of fun."

The event was well run. Each rest stop was organized well and the participants were safe in their walk. There were medical stations available in case they were needed even to ease sore feet. The route took us along through scenic areas in Ottawa, down Sussex Dr., across the bridge to Gatineau. Lunch was at Jacques Cartier Park in Gatineau. After walking 30 kilometres on Saturday, participants camped in tents on the Saturday night. For sore muscles the next day, it was important to remember the significance of the walk.

A team called "Les girls de Maryèle" walked in tribute to their friend, Maryèle Gautier.

"It is very significant," Ms. Gautier said. "I was diagnosed with breast cancer Feb. 8 of this year. I have three kids and I am 30 years old. So, I wasn't expecting it. A friend decided that she was going to do the walk and she has been raising funds through the school where I work. They have stood behind me. You know, this makes it ok. I mean, it is not as hard to do it when you have people behind you. I just see all the people supporting me and all the things they have done."