

November 21, 2008

Free to Breathe event drew hundreds to Fairmount Park

More than 1,300 people kicked off lung cancer awareness month Nov. 2 by gathering at Philadelphia's Lloyd Hall at Fairmount Park for the annual Free to Breathe 5K run/walk fundraiser.

The event, organized by the National Lung Cancer Partnership, raised more than \$125,000 for the partnership's research, education and awareness programs. Corporate sponsors were **Merck & Co. Inc.**, **Liberty Property Trust**, Bristol Meyers Squibb, Ben 95.7, Main Line Health, Cancer Treatment Centers of America and **Brandywine Realty Trust**.

The partnership is a coalition of doctors, lung cancer survivors, researchers and patient advocates who work nationwide to raise awareness.

According to the partnership, one in 13 men and one in 16 women in the United States will get lung cancer in their lifetime and lung cancer kills more people than breast, prostate, colon, liver, kidney and melanoma cancers combined.

Nancy Gatschet, a Merrill Lynch employee, lung cancer survivor, and Philadelphia chairwoman of the partnership, said the event not only raises money, but is a healing process for people who have lost family members and friends to lung cancer.

Dr. Thomas Meyer, director of the lung cancer center at **Lankenau Hospital** in Wynnewood, agrees with Gatschet.

"It gives them an opportunity to do something proactive in their memory," said Meyer, who participated with 40 others from the lung cancer center.

The event has doubled in size each year since it began in 2006. But both Gatschet and Meyer say that lung cancer still has a stigma attached, which stops people from talking about it and underfunds its research.

“Lung cancer doesn’t have a voice; even though it’s 30 percent of all cancers it only gets less than 5 percent of funding from the National Cancer Institute,” said Gatschet. She also talked of how lung cancer patients felt blamed rather than supported for having lung cancer.

“No one should go through lung cancer alone just because they’re ashamed,” she said.

Gatschet plans to open a Philadelphia chapter of the partnership by the middle of next year and to relocate the event, which has outgrown its location at Lloyd Hall and Kelly Drive.