

UC San Diego

UC San Diego News Center

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San Diego Breath of Hope Walk to Benefit UC San Diego Moores Cancer Center May 4

Walk will honor co-founder and community leader, the late Mike Stevens



Attendees at the 2013 Breath of Hope Lung Cancer Walk.

The 6th annual San Diego Breath of Hope Lung Cancer Walk, benefiting lung cancer research at the University of California, San Diego Moores Cancer Center, will take place May 4 at Cancer Survivors Park on Harbor Island. Register at sdbreathofhope.ucsd.edu.

This year's walk will honor event co-founder Mike Stevens. A UC San Diego graduate of 1983, Stevens lost his battle to lung cancer last September. An active, healthy non-smoker with a wife and two children, Stevens was diagnosed with lung cancer at age 44 in 2005. His battle with the disease stretched eight years, despite an initial two-month prognosis. During that period, Stevens became a

national advocate for lung cancer health policy, counseled hundreds of cancer patients as co-chair of Lung Cancer Alliance-California and helped establish the annual San Diego Breath of Hope Lung Cancer Walk.

“The San Diego Breath of Hope Lung Cancer Walk is a community event that demonstrates how passionate San Diegans, such as Mike Stevens, can unite to advance transformative research and therapies aimed at the leading cause of cancer death among both men and women, lung cancer,” said Scott M. Lippman, MD, director of UC San Diego Moores Cancer Center. “Proceeds from the walk will support our world-class physicians and researchers as they develop innovative solutions for treating and preventing this deadly disease.”

According to the American Cancer Society, lung cancer accounts for about 27 percent of all cancer deaths in the United States. More people die each year from lung cancer than colon, breast and prostate cancers combined.

In 2009, Stevens, along with his wife Susan, founded the San Diego Breath of Hope Lung Cancer Walk with two other lung cancer patients whom he met at a UC San Diego-sponsored lung cancer symposium, Kathleen Larson and the late Maria Enriquez, who lost her battle to the disease in 2011. The walk was the first event of its kind in San Diego to raise funds for lung cancer education and research; it has raised more than \$600,000 since its founding.

“People get into a routine and can often forget how much fun life can be,” said Stevens following his diagnosis. “My advice? We should all live our lives as if we were about to die. Take that vacation you have always wanted to go on. Call someone you have not talked to in years. Go skydiving. Do something that makes you happy and smile. Or, as I did, get involved.”

Today, Kathleen Larson is still involved with the event, along with the Enriquez and Stevens families.

“None of us had experience planning a walk like this, but we knew this was a cause worth fighting for,” said Kathleen Larson. “Mike’s passion and dedication for helping others will live on through the San Diego Breath of Hope Walk. His legacy continues as we build awareness of the need for early detection and as we fund research to ultimately find a cure for lung cancer.”

Larson’s story is proof of the importance of early detection of lung cancer. In 2001, a friend working at a body scan facility offered her a scan. Larson agreed to it on a whim. She did not expect the news she received. The



The late Mike Stevens, at left, with NBC anchor Whitney S as last year’s event.

spiral CT scan revealed a suspicious mass between the lobes of Kathleen's left lung. Ten days later, her entire left lung was removed. Five years later, during the now routine scans, another small tumor was found in her right lung. The new tumor was removed using minimally invasive surgery, and Larson is still able to work as a psychotherapist, travel and enjoy time with her family. She credits early detection of her cancer to saving her life and seeks to share that message with others.

"I am generally a private person, but if telling my story can bring one person to early detection, I will tell everyone," said Larson.

Event sponsors include Conrad T. Prebys, Dennis and Carol Berryman, Ron Cadwell, La Jolla Rotary, NBC San Diego 39/7 and La Jolla Blue Book Media Group. Teams that have a single donation of \$1,000 or more include Team Cheryl: In Memory of Cheryl Cohen; Team Craig: Get Fuzzy; Team Dorothy Fleck Remembrance; and Team Zilla.

This year, all proceeds from the event will benefit UC San Diego Moores Cancer Center—where Stevens was treated for his cancer. The walk will begin at Cancer Survivors Park on Harbor Island, at 4100 North Harbor Drive, San Diego. Registration opens at 7:30 a.m. and the walk will start at 9 a.m.

Pre-registration for the 6th annual Breath of Hope Lung Cancer Walk is \$35. On-site registration for the walk is \$40. The cost for survivors to participate is \$15 and children under the age of 12 are \$20. Visit sdbreathofhope.ucsd.edu for information and to register.

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