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Race for the Cure draws 30,000 runners

BY HEATHER NEWMAN • FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER • MAY 31, 2008

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Michigan's largest road race painted downtown Detroit pink today.

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About 30,000 people converged on Comerica Park for the 17th Annual Komen Detroit Race for the Cure. The race raises more than \$2 million for breast cancer treatment and research. Much of it will go to the Karmanos Cancer Institute, the presenting sponsor, to pay for local efforts.

Comerica Park's lots were filled to overflowing with pink: pink tents, the pink shirts of the more than 1,500 survivors in attendance, pink hats, pink flamingoes, pink spray paint in walkers' hair, and pink scarves and pink foam ears handed out by the thousands by sponsors Ford Motor Co. and

Energizer, respectively.

Along the 5-kilometer run/walk route, 10,000 individually decorated pink ribbons were tied to every available wrought iron railing and parking meter.

Steve Menoucik, a 39-year-old from Lansing, won the race overall with 15 minutes, 53 seconds; Promise Vos of Dearborn, 13, was the first female at 19 minutes, 3 seconds. The first survivor to cross the line was Michele Hendrick, 38, of Bloomfield Hills with 21 minutes, 15 seconds.

But for most participants, it was a long sunny stroll at a slow pace along Woodward Avenue, with musical acts ranging from hair metal to horn sections spaced along the route.

"It gives you a new perspective on everything," said Amy Krzyzanowski, a 39-year-old from Plymouth. She ran the race as a survivor this year for the first time, just seven months after finishing chemotherapy and radiation treatments. "Strength in numbers – this is the biggest crowd I've ever seen."



Photo by BRIAN KAUFMAN/ DFP

Doris Rodgers of Southfield (white shirt) celebrates with her friend Sandra Delaine, 50, of Southfield (pink shirt) prior to the start of the Komen Detroit Race for the Cure, expected to draw 30,000 people on Saturday, May 31, 2008. Delaine is a breast cancer survivor and had several friends and family out to support her.



BRIAN KAUFMAN/DFP

Nikki Evans of Detroit finishes the Komen Detroit Race for the Cure as friends cheer her on. The event was expected to draw 30,000 people to downtown Detroit on Saturday, May 31, 2008. Evans was running with Team Kilpatrick.



18-month-old Paige Morris walks down Woodward Avenue with her mother Brenda Morris. The two were taking part in the Komen Detroit Race for the Cure, expected to

Krzyzanowski discovered her tumor doing a routine self-exam and went to see her doctor about it exactly one year ago yesterday. The 5th-grade teacher at Holcomb Elementary in Detroit said that doing the Race for the Cure last fall in Grand Rapids and then again in Detroit helped her work through her anger.

“I was really mad,” she said. “It’s really frustrating. You didn’t do anything to deserve it. It keeps you from doing the things you want to do.”

She was joined at the race by 30-40 members of her team, “Amy’s Army,” made up of friends and family. Their shirts and jerseys proclaimed, “We fight for boobs!”, a symbol of one thing that’s changed in the fight against breast cancer over the years.

When the Komen Race for the Cure series started in Dallas 25 years ago, they weren’t allowed to say in mass media that it was to benefit breast cancer research – instead, it was listed as benefitting a “women’s disease,” said Komen chief operating officer Kimberly Simpson.

Today, more than 1.5 million people nationally walk and run the races, and some team names give a wink and a nod to those puritanical-sounding days.

Teams at the Detroit walk ranged from “Ya Ya’s Ta Tas” to “Nurses for Knockers.” “Sandy’s Support Team” t-shirts featured a life-size bikini top, and the University of Detroit Mercy Physician Assistant shirts proclaimed, “Don’t steal second base!”

“This is such an amazing venue,” Simpsons said, gazing at the crowd and the tiger statues beyond them. “It’s a place where people come together. It’s one person at a time that allows us to spend \$100 million for breast cancer research.”

That’s one reason that Helen Kim, a 68-year-old survivor from Grosse Pointe Woods, showed up with five generations of her family, many clad in hot pink flamingo caps. Even her 90-year-old mother was there in a wheelchair, crowned with an amazing avian confection involving a huge pile of pink feathers on a baseball cap.

“My oncologist says if it wasn’t for the Komen Foundation, there’s a lot of drugs, including some I take, that wouldn’t be out there,” Kim said. “If my oncologist feels that much towards it, I feel I’m doing the right thing.”

Kim did the Race for the Cure before she was diagnosed. She’s now a 13 year survivor, and says the race carries a very different meaning.

“To see so many survivors — to be up there with them the first year —” she stopped, helpless to express her feelings, but gestured towards her eyes, which were full of tears.

Contact **HEATHER NEWMAN** at 313-223-3336 or hnewman@freepress.com.

In your voice

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draw 30,000 people to downtown Detroit on Saturday, May 31, 2008. Paige Morris was dancing in response to a band playing music for the event.

(BRIAN KAUFMAN/DFP)

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