

Spa for a cure

By Brenna Moore / For The Free Press
Background image courtesy of The Spa at Loretto

Cancer is a word that instills fear, sorrow and despair within a person. It seems as though this disease has affected nearly everyone. Although cancer, in every form, causes suffering in all it touches, there are people who strive to see the light at the end of the tunnel.

Two women dedicated to healing and well-being recently came together to host "Spa for a Cure," an event aimed to heal, spark awareness and raise money in the hopes of getting closer to finding a cure.

Suzanne Chavez, director of the Spa at Loretto in Santa Fe, felt there couldn't have been a more perfect place to host an event that would aid in the body and spiritual renewal of those dealing with the disease. And she also would help first-time marathoner and fellow spa director Cherilyn Swenson reach her \$5,000 fundraising goal for the Leukemia & Lymphoma Society. So far Swenson has raised \$3,850.

"I was humbled by the fact that at 40, Cherilyn, a non-athlete, was going to challenge herself to do a marathon for the Team in Training and LLS. I wanted to assist her in any way possible," Chavez said.

Both women have lost very dear friends to cancer.

Chavez said the loss of her best friend to cancer profoundly changed her.

"I realized there are no 'haves and have nots' when it comes to this disease. We are all connected and this is not somebody else's disease — it is all of ours," she said.

Swenson lost her close friend, Harry Purcell, to leukemia almost one year ago.

"After Harry died, I thought, 'What is one small thing I can do?' People feel helpless. I can't do anything to directly help this person, maybe I can do something to help others," Swenson said.

So she joined the Santa Fe Team in Training group, where with other first-time marathoners, she has been training for the upcoming Oct. 18 Nike Women's Marathon San Francisco along with 20,000 other participants. Over the past 20 years, LLS's Team in Training has grown to be the largest



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From left, Nicole Miner, Miss New Mexico 2009; Cherilyn Swenson and Veronica Miner.

charity sports-training program with more than 390,000 participants who have trained for marathons, triathlons and bike rides.

The spa event, held Sept. 22, included mini spa treatments, wine and appetizers, raffle gifts like a plush bathrobe and a couples' spa getaway, a complimentary spa bag, and guest speakers who shared their inspiring stories. The Inn and Spa at Loretto donated the space, the therapists donated the time and all of the prizes were donated from various local businesses, totaling more than \$10,000 in donations for the event, Swenson said.

"As a hotel spa, it would be easy to live in a vacuum and just share our abilities with our guests. The level of talent we have, in the therapists working at the Spa at Loretto, is too great to keep hidden away in our hotel. We as a group are very committed to sharing these gifts with the world at large and we chose this event as our outreach program this year," Chavez said.

Among the guest speakers at the event was Miss New Mexico Nicole Miner, who has dedicated her year of reign to LLS. Miner's mother, Veronica, was diagnosed with Type 2 non-Hodgkins lymphoma SLL in 2005, and was previously diagnosed with cervical cancer as well as Ewing's sarcoma. Miner said every weekend dur-

ing her high school years was spent at the hospital lying by her mother's side. The reason she joined LLS was because it was her way of giving back to her mother.

"She would always write, 'Mom, you're the strongest person I know.' Little does she know that I get my strength from her," Veronica Miner said.

Swenson was confident that the event achieved what she was hoping for: more awareness concerning LLS, raising money for research grants — of which one of the largest is given to UNM — and patient services and support, and bringing more visibility to the Santa Fe Team in Training group. She imparts one final thought of wisdom to those who are feeling overwhelmed by this disease and don't know how to make a difference by quoting Anne Frank: "How wonderful it is that nobody need wait a single moment before starting to improve the world."

The next recruitment for Team in Training takes place in January. For more information on local chapters, visit www.teamintraining.org/nm. For more information about the Leukemia & Lymphoma Society, visit www.lls.org. To donate to Swenson's cause visit <http://pages.teamintraining.org/nm/nikesf09/cherilyn>.

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