

Chippewa Valley community rallies to assist teacher with cancer



Chippewa Valley High School Ninth Grade Center teacher Nichole Wouters was diagnosed with cancer in January, but has received much support from the community and the school. Photo courtesy of KARI DROGOSH

By Nicole Tuttle , For **The Macomb Daily**

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Students at Chippewa Valley High School have promoted multiple fundraisers to assist teacher and coach Nichole Wouters as she battles cancer. Photo courtesy of KARI DROGOSH

The Chippewa Valley Schools community has once again lived up to its moniker of being a “Big Red family” as it has come together to support a teacher diagnosed with cancer.

“Everybody kind of giggles a little when I say, the ‘Big Red family,’ it sounds cliché. But it is and it has always been that way,” said Chippewa Valley High School Assistant Principal Kari Drogosh.

The school district’s family spirit has been evident since Nichole Wouters, a 27-year-old math teacher at Chippewa Valley High School’s Ninth Grade Center in Clinton Township, learned she had cancer.

Wouters, a 2007 Dakota High School graduate who also serves as a varsity volleyball coach, was diagnosed on Jan. 10.

The next day, Drogosh said she began to hear requests from students to begin fundraisers for Wouters. A campaign was then launched titled Wouters Warriors.

T-shirts and bracelets were sold to help Wouters with medical expenses. The shirts sold out in two days and had to be reordered.

Requests for the items came not only from the CVHS campus but from friends and family of Wouters as well as students at district rival Dakota High School in Macomb Township.

“It got gigantic --the basketball program came out to play a game in honor of Ms. Wouters. We sold bracelets and T-shirts at the game. We had Miracle Minute fundraisers on game night,” Drogosh said.

As multiple basketball games were played on Jan. 24 and fundraising was done during each halftime, over \$3,000 was raised in one night, according to Drogosh.

At the Chippewa Valley High School Ninth Grade Center, students are selling heart messages for \$1 as a fundraiser.

“Every group is lending a hand, every student,” Drogosh said.

On Feb. 3 another Miracle Minute fundraiser took place at the school’s variety show and on Feb. 4, teacher Brian Weitzel volunteered to do a photo shoot as a fundraiser. On the Chippewa Valley High School campus alone, more than \$10,000 has been raised for Wouters, Drogosh added.

Support is also coming from the community outside of Chippewa Valley High School with The Believe Foundation offering assistance.

“Wouters Warriors, a Night for Nichole” was held on Feb. 9 at the Italian American Cultural Society Banquet and Conference Center in Clinton Township. More than 500 people attended, raising about \$20,000. Alex Lozovoj, the general manager of the Italian American Cultural Society Banquet and Conference Center, previously worked with Wouters at a Dave and Busters location before she went into teaching.

Wouters was focusing on workouts this past summer when she began having trouble breathing. She developed a cough in the fall that she assumed was a cold. In November, she became severely ill and was diagnosed with pneumonia.

After a chest X-ray and other testing, some results showed abnormalities. A subsequent CT scan, PET scan, biopsy and further testing eliminated doubt. On Jan. 10, Wouters was diagnosed with lung and brain cancer.

A non-smoker with no history of lung or brain cancer in her family, and no pre-existing breathing condition such as asthma, Wouters was stunned.

“I did not believe that. I thought, ‘You have the wrong person, the wrong diagnosis,’” she said.

Wouters is being treated at Beaumont Hospital Royal Oak. In January, she underwent a “Gamma –Knife” targeted radiation to the brain, and is currently undergoing chemotherapy to treat her lungs.

Her goal is to return to the classroom as soon as possible, and she has been able to make a visit as well as keep up with students on FaceTime.

“I love my job, I love teaching and coaching,” Wouters said. “I also have to make sure I am healthy enough to go back for myself and my students.

“I plan on beating this.”

Wouters has a GoFundMe page at gofundme.com/wouters-warriors, which has raised \$14,806 as of Thursday.