

The Macomb Daily

Dakota raises cancer awareness along with school spirit

Students fundraise in first Dakota Fights Cancer event



Dakota High School's Senior Class Council hosted Dakota Fights Cancer in Feb., fundraising for the American Cancer Society. Pictured are American Cancer Society Senior Community Development Manager April Busch, Dakota Senior Class Council President Mario Quaglia, Chippewa Valley Schools Superintendent Ron Roberts and business owner Dario Lucci. (PHOTO COURTESY OF MARIO QUAGLIA)

By [NICOLE TUTTLE](#)

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School spirit isn't usually associated with something as serious as cancer, but Dakota High School's Senior Class Council recently channeled spirit week excitement into fundraising for the American Cancer Society.

Antoinette McFarlen is a teacher at Dakota and a Senior Class Council advisor. She described the class of 2024 senior class officers and representatives as a highly-motivated group, determined to set new traditions for the school. She said the council has kept busy all year with events such as homecoming and a canned food drive. However, Dakota Senior Class Council President Mario Quaglia, age 17, wanted to do something that would have greater meaning and impact on Dakota and in the community. His idea was to start a Dakota Fights Cancer campaign.

"This is the first year something like this has happened that I know of. We started working on this in late December. I have been class president three years and I started to feel like nothing we did really had any lasting impact. It was coming up on 22 years since my grandpa, Wayne Quaglia,

passed away from lung cancer and my mom, Rae Quaglia, was diagnosed with thyroid cancer, and I thought about what we could do to bring more awareness about it,” Quaglia said.

He proposed the idea of a cancer awareness week during a Senior Class Council meeting and found support from his classmates on the council, as they also had friends and family members affected by cancer. The group chose the American Cancer Society as the organization to donate to, with funds tagged for local use.

“Coming from an initiative that was around when I played hockey years prior was a tournament and campaign called Hockey Fights Cancer, which would give us Dakota Fights Cancer,” Quaglia said.

Although the Senior Class Council set Dakota Fights Cancer Spirit Week for February, the overall plan to make a difference for the American Cancer Society started as soon as mid-January. McFarlen said students first distributed fliers across the community to advertise a bottle drive, and the following weekend saw students collecting and returning donations.

“We started out on Jan. 14, passing out over 8,500 bottle drive flyers across ten neighborhoods in Macomb. The next Sunday, we worked 10 a.m. to nearly 9 p.m. picking up and returning over 20,000 bottles, totaling \$2,106. It was a great way to start out Dakota Fights Cancer,” Quaglia said.

Community support for the project was overwhelming, which Quaglia said helped to alleviate his concern that the project would not make as large of an impact as he hoped.

“I had one lady email me asking if there was a limit to how many cans she could donate. Come to find out she had over 30 full bags in her garage, it took up an F-150 and a half,” Quaglia said. “It was the best way to kickstart an event.”

Students also worked to promote the Dakota Fights Cancer Week ahead of Feb. 12 by creating and distributing posters, fliers and packets. They also made a promotional video. Students additionally created an Instagram account, which heavily promoted “I Fight For…” placards.

“We spent our lunch periods walking around asking people to fill them out in honor of those who were fighting or have fought a battle with cancer. In just a week we had hundreds filled out,” Quaglia said. “We taped every single one of them up in the school, mostly hanging in the atrium where a majority of students walk under every day. It’s a testament to the fact that there are so many people diagnosed with cancer and each of those diagnosis’ affect so many other people too.”

Dakota Fights Cancer Spirit Week was held the week of Feb. 12. The week included spirit dress days as well as donation opportunities. Donation opportunities continue throughout the month.

“The main fundraiser was the online donations through PaySchools events, people can donate any amount and a donation of \$25 or more will receive a Dakota Fights Cancer T-shirt,” McFarlen said, adding students reached out to local restaurants and decided on activities to host.

“They wanted to have some activities that were directly tied to fundraising, but also wanted to include activities that would raise awareness and allow all students to participate without being tied to financial donations,” McFarlen said.

The Dakota Fights Cancer Spirit Week dress days started on Feb. 13, when students were encouraged to wear purple to show support for those who have all types of cancer. The next day it was pink to support those who have breast cancer. Students were encouraged to wear black on Feb. 15 to support those who have skin cancer while Feb. 16, was white to support those who have lung cancer.

“It was hard to decide what colors to choose as our whole goal was to draw attention to all kinds of cancer, not just the more publicized ones. Each day we saw more and more people in matching colors and it was very encouraging,” Quaglia said.

The Senior Class Council also handed out 1,500 ribbons in 15 different colors, each representing support for those with different types of cancer.

“Over the week we saw ribbons and matching colors, and we realized that what we did wasn’t for nothing, it actually had meaning. It’s hard to ask students to scan a QR code and donate, but just the spirit week showed us that people cared,” Quaglia said.

Participating local restaurants offered from 10 to 20 percent donations to the cause on purchases. Partner restaurants in the endeavor included:

- Jollibee in Sterling Heights: Feb. 12
- Texas Roadhouse in Sterling Heights and Chesterfield Township: Feb. 13
- Buddy’s Pizza in Shelby Township: Feb. 14.
- Salsarita’s Fresh Mexican Grill in Macomb Township: Feb. 15
- Seoul Two Hands Fresh Corn Dogs in Macomb Township: Feb. 16

Students also offered a soft-serve ice cream day at Dakota on Feb. 15 during student lunches as a fundraiser for the cause. Quaglia contacted Treat Yo Self Creamery LLC business owner and Dakota graduate Dario Lucci, who donated resources, time and a soft-serve ice cream machine to the cause.

Superintendent Ron Roberts participated as a “celebrity server” for the cause on Feb. 15.

“The council knew they wanted Ron Roberts to be a part of this event in some way. Dakota students love him, he’s like a celebrity to them, so we were thrilled when he came in to serve ice cream for us on Thursday,” McFarlen said.

Quaglia said \$350 was raised in less than an hour, and ice cream sold out before third hour lunch. Although Dakota Fights Cancer Spirit Week finished on Feb. 16 with a partial day as this kicked off mid-winter break, Quaglia said that the Dakota Fights Cancer movement and fundraising will continue through the end of February. As of Feb. 19, Quaglia said that approximately \$5,000 had been raised for the American Cancer Society.

“As for me, Dakota Fights Cancer is what I’m proud of most out of four years of high school. I’ll always look at what we did as something that made a difference,” Quaglia said.