

COMMUNITY

Walk for Life in Memory of Anthony Nickols

By Dianne Anderson
Staff Writer

When most parents are busy preparing their child for high school graduation, and off to the next big phase of life, college and career, Patricia Nickols was struck with the heartbreaking reality that she would lose her son to cancer.

Diagnosed in his senior year with an advanced form of non-Hodgkin's Lymphoma, a disease that tears down the immune system, the bright and promising Anthony J. Nickols Jr. died two years later in 1999.

In memory of Anthony, this Saturday, April 17, his family and friends are continuing their fight to eradicate childhood cancer. The Anthony J. Nickols Jr. Foundation is hosting their 2nd Annual Walk for Life.

The 3-mile walk will start at 8:30 a.m. at Eisenhower High School where Anthony attended.

"It's really to get the people out," said his mother, Patricia Nickols. "We had a wonderful turnout last year. There were over 500 walkers and donors, with about 300 actually participating in the walk."

Like so many American families facing the struggle to cope with the disease, she said the hard truth is that children die from cancer every single day, and it can happen to anybody. It remains the leading cause of death by disease among children, from babies to age 14.

In large part, the Foundation's event goes on through the financial support of Clarisa Howard, president of bd Systems, a high-technology and systems integration company. Other sponsors include Union Bank, San Bernardino County Housing Authority, Tobin & Associates, Inc., among many others.

"It is because she [Clarisa] is really dedicated to continue the legacy of her nephew, who is my son. And she is determined to support us, not just in raising funds, but to support other families with children who have cancer and going through the horrible ordeal of chemotherapy, and medications," Nickols said.

There were no obvious signs that Anthony was sick. His mother found out when she took him in for

a routine check-up, and discovered his cancer had already progressed to the invasive stage four. Anthony received a bone marrow transplant from his sister to try to prolong his life, but it wasn't long enough.

Nickols is the executive director of the Community Action Partnership for San Bernardino County, which provides programs and assistance for low-income families. She has been helping people in need throughout the community for years.

But Nickols stressed that no amount of reliving the detailed sadness of the past could bring Anthony back. Instead, she chooses a path they both had agreed on, to share his story and educate the community about the disease.

"It's his story and our story," she said. "His courageous battle and his legacy is really about helping others and to support other families, and hopefully to raise money for a cure."

Childhood cancers are rare, but

Empire, Inc., also the American Cancer Society, along with 20 other health vendors distributing literature, and conducting health screenings.

"We've invited the community out to come out and take advantage of the free testing. There will be heart and lung screening, and the health and vendor fair is open for people whether they are walking or not," said Carol Wade, spokesperson for the project.

Cancer is a disease that strikes someone from every family in America. The hope is that more money will be raised this year over last year to find a cure.

"We won't turn away any donations, no matter how small," she said. "We're giving people an opportunity with a name tag to put on their tee-shirts to say who they are walking in recognition of."

The American Cancer Society recommends regular checkups, watch for unusual swelling of lymph nodes, loss of energy, headache, and several other ailments that are commonly mistaken for cold symptoms.

"These are just so vague, it's really hard to know," said Becky Moore, spokesperson for the American Cancer Society in the Inland Empire.

"I think the bottom line is if your kid has something going on, you have to get them to the pediatrician. And you as the mom or the dad has to be the advocate, and say 'run some tests.'"

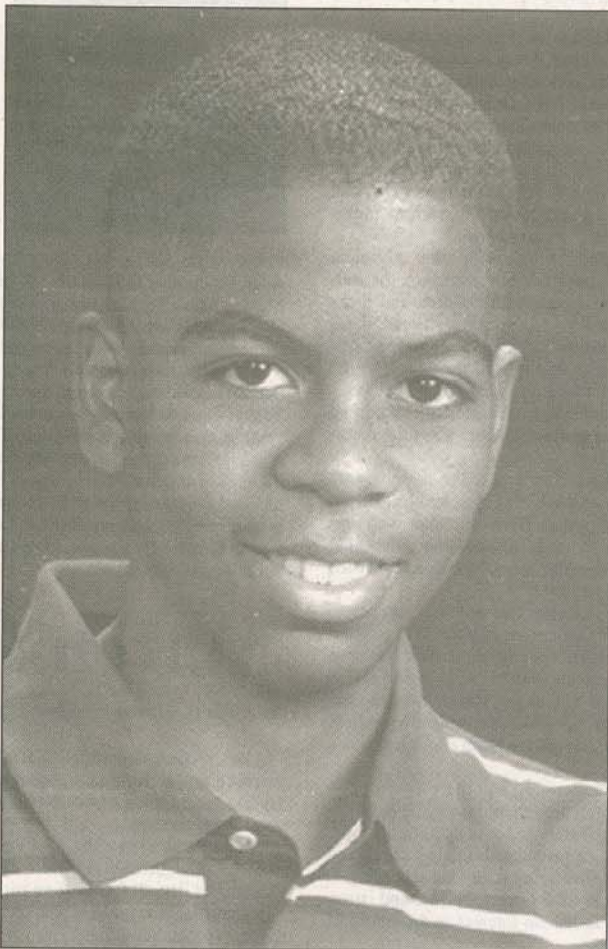
If detected early, there is a greater probability of attacking and stopping the cancer. Overall, the mortality rate from childhood cancer has declined 49% since 1975.

Depending on the location or nature of the disease, for many childhood cancers, the five-year survival rate is about 78 percent, which implies the child will grow up to live a normal life.

"It's good now considering what it was 20 years ago, it was not anywhere near that," Moore said. "As hard as it is for Anthony's family, when it's your kid, none of the rhetoric means anything. But we are slowly, slowly making progress."

To donate to the Anthony Nickols Jr. Foundation, call (909) 877-0796

See their website, www.nickolswalkforlife.org



On Tuesday, April 13, which is Anthony's birthday, the County Board of Supervisors presented a proclamation at their morning meeting to Anthony's mother and his aunt.

they will result in death for an estimated 1,500 children this year.

The walk is supported by several groups, including the Candlelighters, the Childhood Cancer Foundation of the Inland