



Chesapeake, Va. Cancer Survivor Leads Benefit Walk to Focus Attention on Early Detection

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To: State and Assignment desks

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CHESAPEAKE, Va., March 28 /U.S. Newswire/ -- Chesapeake, Va. resident Minnie Ashworth, who successfully battled oral cancer two years ago, wants fewer people to have to withstand the ordeal she survived. She has joined a national effort to reduce the death rate from the disease, which can be conquered if caught in its early stages.

A Walk for Awareness will take place Saturday, April 9, at Chesapeake City Park in Chesapeake, Va. Proceeds will benefit the non-profit Oral Cancer Foundation - Web: <http://www.oralcancerfoundation.org>

Event Includes Free, Fast, and Painless Oral Cancer Screenings

During the fund-raising walk, doctors from the VCU School of Dentistry and from the Eastern Virginia Medical School will conduct free oral cancer screenings. These quick and painless examinations of the mouth, if conducted as part of everyone's annual dental exam, could dramatically reduce the number of deaths from oral cancer. 30,000 individuals are newly diagnosed with oral cancer each year in the US, and it kills almost 9,000 Americans annually. The five-year survival rate is only about 50 percent. Early detection would drastically reduce the death rate.

It was a dentist who raised the alarm when Ashworth told him her gum still hadn't healed long after she'd had a tooth extracted. The dentist immediately referred Ashworth to an oral surgeon, whose biopsy revealed cancer. Ashworth underwent radiation to shrink the tumor, then surgery to remove half her lower jaw, which was reconstructed using bone from her lower leg. During her recovery, Ashworth discovered the Oral Cancer Foundation's web site, and used its educational section and discussion forums to research her condition, and get support from others. Now healed from her treatments, she has begun to participate in the forums again -- this time as a survivor giving back advice and support of her own to those newly diagnosed.

Given the statistics associated with this cancer, Ashworth knows she is lucky; she's back to her 1,000-mile-a-minute life as a cheer organization coach, wife, mother of eight, and grandmother of three. On top of it all, she's organizing the OCF's Walk for Awareness. Among the walkers will be fellow survivors with whom Ashworth corresponded on the Oral Cancer Foundation's online forums.


"It's amazing to see a woman who's undergone as much as Minnie has, and whose life is as busy as hers, work so hard to raise awareness about this deadly disease," says Brian Hill, founder of the Oral Cancer Foundation, and himself an oral cancer survivor. "Her desire to give something back now that she has survived the cancer will help thousands of others." The Oral Cancer Foundation works nationally to raise awareness about the disease and promote annual screenings for early detection.

In addition to the walk and oral cancer screenings, the Walk for Awareness will feature a variety of booths where besides the usual T-shirts and pins, information about the risk factors, and warning signs and symptoms for oral cancer will be distributed to participants. Registrations will begin at 8 a.m., and the walk at 9 a.m. The event will end at approximately 3 p.m. For information, call 757-962-3709.

About the Oral Cancer Foundation

The Oral Cancer Foundation is a national non-profit 501(c) 3, public service charity that provides information, support, and advocacy related to this disease. It maintains a web site at <http://www.oralcancer.org> that receives over 15 million hits per month. At the forefront of this year's agenda is the drive to promote solid awareness in the minds of the American public about the risk factors and warning signs of early oral cancer, and the need to undergo an annual oral cancer screening, with an outreach to the dental and medical community to provide this service as a matter of routine practice. Supporting the foundation's goals is a scientific advisory board composed of leading cancer authorities from varied medical and dental specialties, and from prominent cancer educational, treatment, and research institutions in the United States.

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