

Relay a lifeline to survivors

By **JODELLE GREINER**
Sentinel Staff Writer

Fairmont

When Alison Lutterman was diagnosed with cancer, she had a good example to follow: her grandmother, Irene Lutterman.

Grandmother and granddaughter participated Saturday in the Relay for Life at the Martin County Fairgrounds. Alison was honored as one of 20 honorary chairs in celebration of the event's 20th year.

The relay has become a way of life for the Lutterman family, including Alison's parents, Gary and Linda Lutterman. The family walks in memory of Alison's grandfather, Robert Lutterman, who died of melanoma in 1991.

A car accident led to the

diagnosis of Alison's first brain tumor in 2003.

"My doctor suggested a CT scan to make sure nothing had happened from the accident," she said. The accident hadn't caused damage, but the tests revealed a spot.

Because they didn't know what it was, Alison underwent multiple tests to rule out possibilities, including Multiple Sclerosis.

After rounds of tests revealed nothing, another scan was taken. Doctors suspected a tumor and recommended surgery, which was done at the University of Minnesota.

"The risk of surgery is less than the risk of it becoming cancerous," said Alison.

The tumor was diagnosed as an astrocytoma — thank-

LUTTERMANS

Continued on Page 8

Event raises \$80,000-plus

By **JODELLE GREINER**
Sentinel Staff Writer

FAIRMONT — The 20th Annual Relay for Life at the Martin County Fairgrounds on Saturday has raised \$80,525, with more money coming in, said Sheri Markquart, Relay chairperson.

The total was several thousand dollars more than was raised last year.

"I want to thank all the sponsors, teams, committee and public that attended," Markquart said. "It takes all of those peo-

ple to pull off a successful Relay."

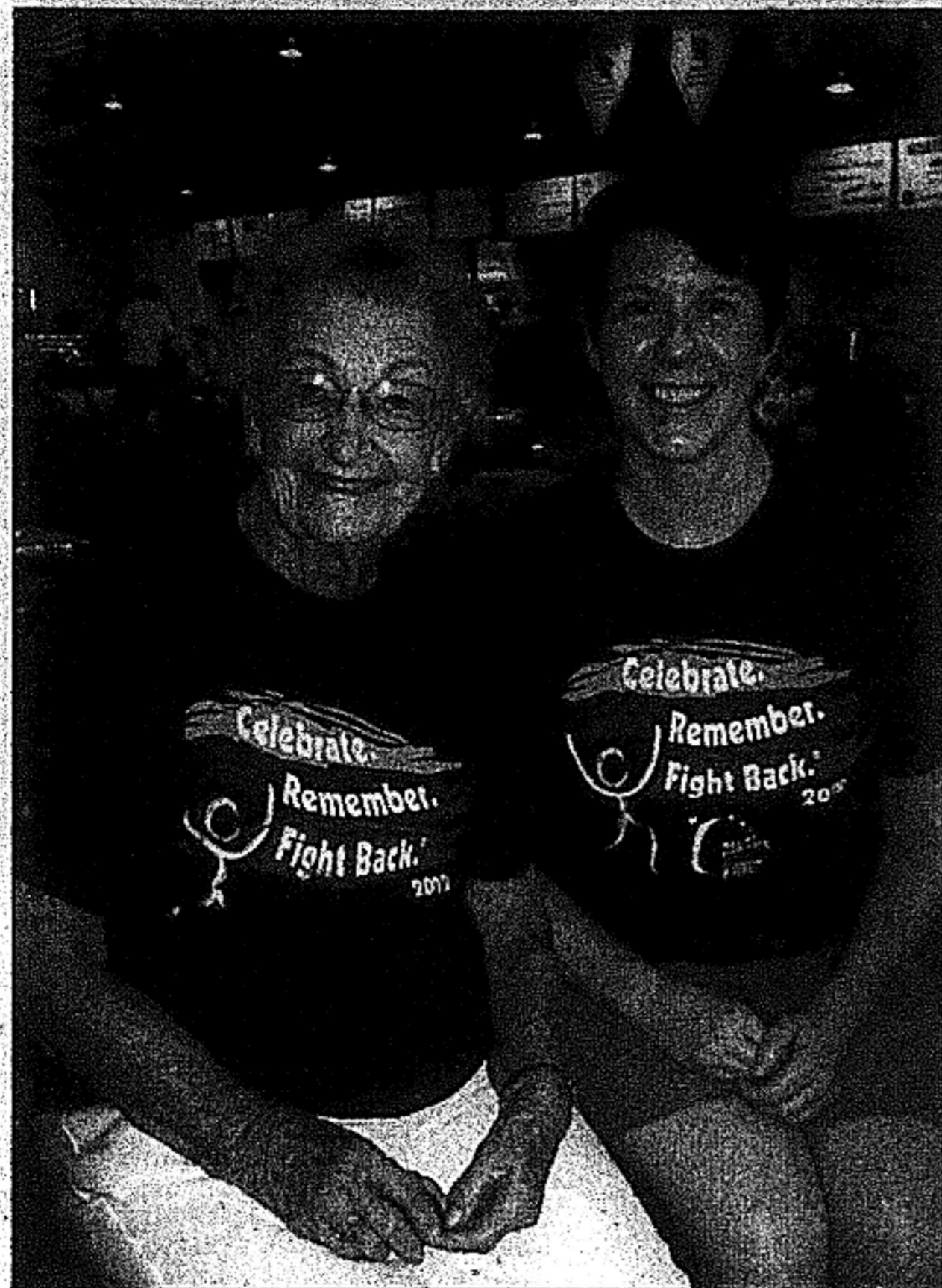
Part of that grand total is the \$6,885 raised from the silent and live auctions. Another \$1,500 or so was collected from the pork patty feed.

Eighteen teams participated in raising funds. The tally is \$11,000 so far, but not all the teams have turned in their money yet, Markquart said.

"The fundraisers, they do add up," she said.

RELAY RESULTS

Continued on Page 8



Irene and Alison Lutterman

LUTTERMANS

Continued from Page 1

fully a benign growth.

But Alison wasn't out of danger.

Three years later, she started getting "severe, severe headaches."

"I get migraines, so I thought it was just my migraines getting out of hand," Alison said.

The pain wasn't typical of her migraines, though. The new pain would wake her up at night, and exhaust her to the point "I couldn't do anything," she said.

She went to her primary doctor, who recommended a scan based on Alison's history.

"The tumor had returned," Alison said.

All grandmothers worry about their grandchildren, but Irene had a special knowledge of what Alison was going through: In 1999, she was diagnosed with colon cancer.

"It started with diverticulitis," Irene said.

A colonoscopy was ordered, but she wasn't worried.

"I was feeling good," said Irene — until she heard the doctor wanted to talk to her.

"He told me I had a tumor about as big around as a 50-cent piece," Irene said.

The tumor hadn't broken through the colon wall, and doctors at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester were able to remove all of it. Irene underwent chemo for several months, but has remained healthy.

Seeing her granddaughter facing cancer was not what Irene wanted.

"I was very sad," she said. "I felt sorry for her, prayed for her every day. Prayed and hoped someday she'll be completely cured and not have more tumors popping up."

Alison appreciated being able to lean on her grandmother.

"She was an inspiration, because she's so strong, a great role model," Alison said. "She is such a great support, too; always sending me notes and checking in on me."

Alison went back to the



Above: Cancer survivors were honored at the 20th Annual Relay for Life at the Martin County Fairgrounds Saturday. Survivors wore purple shirts; survivors wearing green shirts were part of a group of 20 recognized as honorary Relay chairs this year.

doctors who had removed her first brain tumor and had the second one removed. Although this was also an astrocytoma, it was diagnosed as a grade 4 cancer. After surgery, Alison underwent chemotherapy for almost a year and radiation for six weeks; she spent 2007-2010 recovering.

"It takes you so long to get physically and financially and emotionally and mentally well," Alison said.

During this time, Alison's mother, Linda, suggested she take part in Relay.

"I was timid about it, being so young," Alison said. "I didn't want to draw attention."

She came and she learned.

"I saw how good it was, saw all the people I knew who I didn't realize had cancer," Alison said. "The range of ages, the kids, and how much fun [the relay] is."

In the summer of 2010, Alison was gearing up to take the entrance exam to be a physician's assistant, but she developed a cough she couldn't shake. Her chiropractor said it had been

going on way too long, so Alison went back to her doctor, who listened to her lungs.

"It sounded like fluid on the lungs," Alison said.

She was sent for x-rays, which did show fluid in the right lung, and a spot there, as well. About 2 liters of fluid was drained off.

"That's a lot," Alison said.

A needle biopsy was done at Regions Hospital and the pathologist sent it to the Mayo Clinic. It was confirmed to be Ewings sarcoma.

"The reason it was bizarre to them is Ewings sarcoma in a person my age is seen in the bone, not the lung," Alison said. "If it's in the lung, it's metastasized from the bones."

Alison did not have cancer in her bones and other things were puzzling.

"Ewings in the lung is seen in children," Alison said. "Astrocytoma is also a children's tumor."

Alison decided to have genetic testing done and researched her family tree.

She knew about her

grandparents' cancers, but Alison found out she had a lot of relatives, on both sides of the family, who'd had cancer.

The genetic test for Li-Fraumeni syndrome came back negative, but the tests might not be conclusive, Alison said.

While there is uncertainty, Alison celebrates small victories. She is study coordinator for a pre-clinical research organization, which conducts studies before clinical trials are run. She finished her treatments in December. Now, she needs to go back every three months to make sure the cancer is still being held at bay.

One thing that helps her look forward to the future is Relay for Life.

Alison comes down from Minneapolis, Irene comes over from Sherburn, and the rest of the clan gathers for the annual tradition.

"Each year, it's built up our family," Alison said. "My nieces and nephews look forward to this time. It ends up being a big celebration. It feels good as a survivor to celebrate this."

Jodelle Greiner