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UNH Student Volunteers For Relay For Life, Earns Credit

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DURHAM, N.H. - Kristen Morgovonik wants to help people. In particular, the University of New Hampshire freshman from Exeter has chosen the American Cancer Society's annual Relay for Life event at UNH, April 19 - 20, 2008, to work with. Cancer is an issue that has touched her life personally since her mother was diagnosed with breast cancer in 2007. Unlike other volunteers, Morgovonik is earning college credit through three courses at the Thompson School of Applied Science's community leadership program at UNH.

Rather than studying from a text book, Morgovonik is learning through her own research and experience working with the American Cancer Society, collecting college credit, and earning invaluable work experience. "Organizing events and publicity are what I want to do so it really helps to have this experience," she says.

In the course "Introduction to Non-Profit Organizations," students like Morgovonik choose a nonprofit organization to research. They work at the organization for their "Organizing and Supervising Volunteers" class, and in the "Communication Within Community" course, they construct public service announcements and letters to the public and using their chosen organization as a model.

"Tying in three classes like that is very unique and gives students an in-depth view of their organization and some real hands-on learning," says Kate Hanson, associate professor and chair of the community leadership program. Unique enough to garner some attention; in 2007, the program was awarded the Spirit of New Hampshire Volunteer Champion Award in Higher Education from Governor John Lynch.

Studying and volunteering are hallmarks of the community leadership program and have led Morgovonik to a cause she believes in. "Cancer has hit my family and friends hard. Doing the Relay for Life makes me feel like I'm putting my foot down and telling cancer that it's got to go!" she says.

Morgovonik leads the publicity committee for UNH's Relay for Life and has created posters, helped distribute flyers, and sold T-shirts. She's convinced the 90 women in her sorority, Alpha Phi, to walk in the relay, and has given a presentation on it for her public speaking class.

Ten days before the event, UNH's Office of Community Service and Learning reports they have 895 participants on 100 teams and have already raised \$46,727 toward their \$120,000 goal. Kristen Morgovonik is part of that success. "She's been a great asset," says Marianne Fortescue, staff advisor for the event and coordinator in the Office of Community Service and Learning. "Her work has been above and beyond the call of duty."

It's more than duty or work experience, though. Morgovonik's mother, a cancer survivor, and her sister will walk this year with her. "It's about helping people. Real people," she says.

April is National Cancer Awareness month and the perfect month for American Cancer Society's signature event Relay for Life. The 24-hour fundraiser involves teams of eight to 15 people walking or running in shifts after raising money through pledges, which is "a way to celebrate survivors, get the word out there about prevention and treatment, and basically support the cause until there is a cure," according to Morgovonik.

UNH's Relay for Life begins Saturday, April 19, 2008 at noon in the indoor track at the Field House at UNH. There are themed laps - a circus lap, three-legged race lap, and eggs on a spoon lap-as well as entertainment from a DJ, performances by the Hepcats Swing Club and the Tri-Star Gymnasts, and a cardio kickboxing lesson in honor of the theme "Celebrate, Remember, and Fight Back."For more information, go to www.unh.edu/serve or call 603-862-2197.

The American Cancer Society Web site states that an estimated 1.4 million Americans will be diagnosed with cancer in 2008-of those, more than 500,000 may die. Cancer rates are on the decline, though, in part to aggressive research, treatment, and fundraising event such as the Relay for Life.

Visit www.thompsonschooll.unh.edu for information on the community leadership two-year degree program, where Kristin Morgovonik is enrolled, and the 14 other areas of specialization offered at the Thompson School of Applied Science at UNH in Durham.

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