

## Head for The Cure raises funds for cancer research

Written By Loren Stanton Wednesday, 26 August 2009

It might not be possible to run from brain cancer, but Tim Elliott is among those who run against it.

The 49-year-old Overland Park lawyer will jog with his Team Elliott in this Sunday's seventh annual Head for The Cure 5k Run and Walk, which is devoted to fundraising for cancer research.

Quite a feat for a guy who had brain surgery 15 months ago and has battled periodic seizures ever since.

While his medical and personal challenges are similar to those of other patients with malignant brain tumors, Elliott's approach and attitude have won recognition and admiration.

A year ago, Elliott received a Head for the Cure Keeping the Faith award, which goes to those whose "courage, strength, will and faith are an inspiration."

In the weeks and months since the day he learned of his cancer in May 2008, Elliott has developed a lifestyle, a regimen and a philosophy that keep him focused on the positives and the future.

Not that he is free from discouraging thoughts and tough moments, but ask him about the challenges and dangers of his disease and Elliott seems uncomfortable with the slant of the question. So he steers the conversation on a different course.

"You ask me about the negatives, but I say there is a positive part of having a low-grade tumor. It has been a catalyst for making some changes in my life. Besides, we're all going to die. There are a lot of people who are going to die before me," Elliott said.

Do not be fooled by that "low-grade" characterization of his condition. Elliott is sincere and correct in saying that his tumor, called oligodendroglioma, is slow growing. And he indeed was fortunate to have a Stage 2 tumor rather than the more dangerous Stage 3 variety. Still, make no mistake, he is dealing with serious stuff.

As with many brain tumors, surgeons could not remove all of Elliott's. They took only about 60 percent to 70 percent of it rather than endanger vital motor and mental functions by being too aggressive.



EDMEE RODRIGUEZ/SUN PHOTO TIM ELLIOTT, an Overland Park lawyer, will jog with his Team Elliott in Sunday's seventh annual Head for The Cure 5k Run and Walk. Elliott had brain surgery 15 months ago and has battled periodic seizures ever since.

"The tumor I have has been described to me as being like chicken wire," said Elliott, explaining why it is especially difficult to completely extract.

"Part of the tumor was next to the area of the brain that controls speech. I have to speak to make a living," said Elliott, who agreed with the surgeon's call on that decision.

Elliott had the choice of receiving chemotherapy or radiation treatments, but he said doctors told him they might have little or no effect. So he declined that option.

What he accepted was a personal challenge to fight the condition on two fronts. Physically, he has developed a vigorous exercise regimen and worked to improve his diet. Mentally and emotionally, he gains strength from those close to him and from his faith.

"I had tremendous support from family and friends. I can't ever describe how important that was to have that support," Elliott said.

The family includes his wife, Stephanie, daughter Megan, son Michael and stepchildren Alicia and Jordan Billings.

The spiritual side, Elliott said, provided strength even in the immediate aftermath of receiving his diagnosis.

"I had a surprising comfort, and I attribute that completely to my faith. I really wasn't distressed at all," he said.

Stephanie said her husband's approach to cancer coincides with how he always has approached life.

"I haven't been surprised at all, because Tim always has been a very positive person and a go-getter whose attitude is, 'OK, let's do this thing,'" she said.

That might be so, but the patient says the experience with cancer has taught him things and changed him — for the better.

"I have learned that just two things are really important, my relationship with God and my relationship with other people. That's where I try to keep my focus, and if I do that everything else will work out," Elliott said.

Stephanie said the family has taken positives from the experience as well.

"I think it has brought us closer together. It was kind of a wake-up call to how important we are to each other and how important it is not to let time go by unappreciated," she said.

Part of Elliott's spiritual relationship includes gathering for three hours each week with a small group at Ascension Catholic Church called Christ Renews His Parish.

"We talk about where we've seen Christ in our lives in the last week and where we've been deficient, and what we're going to do to increase our faith and relationship to God," Elliott said. "Faith always matters. It can be a good thing or a bad thing. If you have it, it's a good thing. If you don't have it, it's a bad thing."

Elliott, who was active in community and fundraising projects before the cancer, finds such endeavors particularly gratifying and meaningful now.

The former Eagle Scout, who has had an active role in his children's Scouting endeavors, supports a charitable group called Friends of Troop 257 Inc. He served as president of the Shannon Valley Homes Association and has been on the Johnson County Bar Association's Habitat for Humanity Committee.

Involvement with Head for the Cure is valuable to him on several levels. His team raised about \$3,100 last year, and he is hoping this year's group of about 60 will do even better.

When he told Stephanie recently that he should call team members about upping their pledges, he said she kidded him about getting competitive with the project.

Actually, he said later, he is motivated by more than reaching a money goal that is bigger than other participating teams.

"The fundraising is great and it deserves the level of support it gets, but what's important is the level of support it shows for people who are in my situation or worse. To see people get up early on a Sunday morning and donate their time and money, it provides an emotional support and comfort. And with any illness, your mental state of mind is very important," Elliott said.

Among the challenges he faces now are mild to moderate seizures that strike every week or two. He is taking medications aimed at controlling such episodes, which are not uncommon for those recovering from brain cancer surgeries.

He inquired about undergoing surgery to limit or stop the seizures, but his neurosurgeon told him the problem was not serious enough to warrant that step.

"My personal tendency is that I want to control things, and this has taught me there are things you can't control. And that's not necessarily bad," Elliott said. "I've tried to change my mindset that I need to take time to reflect on the benefits I have and on my spiritual life."

## **FAST FACTS**

The seventh annual Head for the Cure 5K Run and Walk will be held Sunday, Aug. 30, at Corporate Woods Office Park.

Race day registration and check-in begin at 7 a.m. and the race starts at 8. A Kids Fun Run will be at 9 a.m., and an awards ceremony will be held at 9:30.

Participants gather near Building 40 in Corporate Wood, located just west of College Boulevard and Antioch Road.

Registration costs \$25 per person. For families of three or more and teams of 15 or more, the fee is \$22 each. For the Kids Fun Run, the cost is \$10. All participants receive an event T-shirt.

Last year's event drew about 3,000 participants and raised about \$200,000. Since the inaugural event in 2003, almost \$700,000 has been raised.

To register online, go to [headforthecure.org](http://headforthecure.org). For questions, call (816) 204-1780.

Donations to the Head for the Cure Foundation can be sent to: Head for the Cure, 250 Richards Road, Kansas City, MO 64116.