

Laugh for the Cure raises money, hope

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By Rosie Molinary

As a young girl, Tammy Greyshock's life was filled with breast cancer as two of her aunts fought the disease.

Unlike some families who never talk about the elephant in the room, Greyshock's family did the opposite.

They talked about the cancer, and made jokes, to keep the disease from taking away their spirit.

This approach proved valuable for the family when Greyshock's mother was diagnosed with breast cancer in 1986 at age 41.

They kept talking and laughing, and they beat the cancer together.

After her college graduation, Greyshock, now 36, noticed the convergence of attention on breast health.

"In the early 90s, you really started to see a groundswell of people beginning to own the breast cancer mission," she says. "I became involved with Race for the Cure as a participant and that connection grew."

That was the beginning of Greyshock's relationship with the former Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer Foundation, which on its 25th anniversary this year changed its name to Susan G. Komen for the Cure and adopted a new mission of eradicating breast cancer as a terminal illness.

When a move brought Greyshock to Charlotte, she stepped up her efforts for Komen by chairing the Wachovia Corporate race team and volunteering more actively.

But she wanted to do more.

An idea formed as she recalled her family's therapeutic laughter throughout her mother's illness, and as she thought about The Comedy Zone, a comedy club owned by her partner, Brian Heffron.

Ultimately she created a solitary fundraiser, Laugh for the Cure, a PG-rated comedy show that would celebrate life and introduce a whole new demographic of willing supporters to Komen.

"One of Komen's missions is to further their reach and opportunities so as to increase breast-cancer awareness and funding," says Greyshock.

That first event in summer 2002, which Greyshock planned as a one-time-only event, raised \$6,000 with a crowd of 200.

Buzz followed.

"By the fall, we realized this really could be something more and thought 'What do we want to turn

this into?" she recalls.

"Laugh" became an individual, trademarked Charlotte initiative under the Komen umbrella, raising a combined \$103,200 in six events so far.

Then, in summer 2004, the Eastern Washington Komen affiliate contacted Greyslock about launching its own Laugh for the Cure.

Closely coached by Greyslock, who volunteers as executive director of Laugh for the Cure while still working full-time with Wachovia, the affiliate has raised \$36,700 in three events.

For her efforts, Greyslock was named a 2006 Yoplait Champion, an annual recognition of 25 breast-cancer champions throughout the U.S., and that national attention brought three more affiliates into the Laugh for the Cure fold -- Houston, Jacksonville and Minneapolis.

Her hope is that the five cities will yield over \$100,000 for Komen this year.

So far, three cities have held their 2007 events and raised \$57,850.

Like Komen, most nonprofits struggle with how to keep growing, says Greyslock, and something like Laugh for the Cure appeals to a whole new demographic of supporters.

By taking advantage of a volunteer's ideas and enthusiasm, as the Charlotte affiliate did, the organization was able to give something new a try.

"I draw inspiration from the countless number of women who I have met along the way," says Greyslock. "It is interesting to be a strong breast-cancer advocate and not be a survivor myself, but I have met so many women who have been generous enough to share their journey with me, and they inspire me to continue the fight."

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