

# Jon's Journal

Random musings from the pen of Jonathan Scholles



**Beating the Odds**

## Beloved teacher, Nelson, cuts ribbon; opens another successful Holmes County Relay for Life

In about two weeks, her hair will begin to fall out, an unfortunate yet all too common side effect of chemotherapy.

But in a relatively short time since being diagnosed with breast cancer, Cheryl Nelson has become a symbol of strength within Holmes County and a beacon of hope for many like her fighting the second most common form of cancer.

Nelson – a third grade teacher at Millersburg Elementary – was

awarded the honor last Friday to cut the opening ceremony ribbon at the Holmes County Relay for Life at West Holmes High's Knights' Stadium, kicking off an 18-hour event that not only celebrates cancer survivors but raises awareness and money for its hopeful cure.

After cutting the ribbon, the 44-year-old mother of three (Christa, Holly, Stacie) received an emotional hug from two of her students, Jake and Melissa

Bowman, and then grabbed one from the children's mother, Heidi Bowman.

"It was an honor," Nelson said of the ribbon-cutting. "I loved to do it. Everyone in Holmes County has been so supportive."

Cancer survivors are a tight-knit community. And once a year, Relay for Life unites that community for a celebration of unity and love.

"Before this, I had no idea how many people went through what

**Cheryl Nelson continued**

I went through,” Nelson said. “All the cards and support have been wonderful.”

In February, Nelson learned she had vertigo, a sensation of feeling dizzy despite being motionless. Not knowing what vertigo really was, Nelson simply chalked it up as high blood pressure.

After again and again putting off a routine physical, Nelson broke down over spring break and went in for a check-up. Then on April 7, she found out she had breast cancer.

She was floored.

Nelson then knew she would have to break the news to her 21-students.

“I had breast cancer, and I knew something had to be done,” she said. “... The kids have been great through this.”

Nelson, an Apple Creek resident, had a double mastectomy on May 10, and missed a total of three weeks of school.

While she admitted it was unlikely, she had a goal to return the final day of school to see her students one last time. Nelson met her goal.

“I showed-up the last day, and it was a surprise to them,” said Nelson, who just celebrated her 23rd-year at Millersburg Elementary. “I told them next year, I probably won’t

have hair because of chemotherapy. But I’ve been through the worst part.”

In her absence and in her honor, Millersburg Elementary united to form a Relay for Life team and raised money for the cause.

“They told me, ‘We’re going to go walk for you,’” Nelson said of her students’ Relay for Life pledge. “They put up little notepads of names that were sponsored and I had so many. They were showing me, ‘Look Mrs. Nelson, look how many are for you.’”

Since surgery in May, Nelson has regained some strength, and is now walking four miles a day.

“I feel so awesome,” she said.

Plain and simple, Nelson is a fighter.

“She is a pit bull,” said husband Chris Nelson, 48. “She would worry more about her class, her mom, the girls and me.”

Cheryl Nelson has received support from seemingly everyone in her life, especially sister, Shirley Croskey, and her fellow Millersburg Elementary teachers.

“I told her that everything is going to be all right,” said co-worker and fellow survivor

Carren Leppla, who was diagnosed with lung cancer a year ago.

It’s been rumored that two teachers would shave their head in support of Nelson this upcoming school year.

“I told them, ‘No,’” she said. “Just get matching scarves.”

Nelson’s prognosis is pretty good. With eight treatments of chemotherapy over a 16-week period, there is a 28 percent chance that her cancer will re-surface.

*Jonathan Scholles is an award-winning sports writer who has covered Holmes County sports for over five-years, including two of the four Hiland Lady Hawks Division IV state championships. A Walsh University graduate (2005), Scholles is the sports editor for The Budget newspaper in Sugarcreek, as well as a correspondent for Ohio’s largest prep website, JHuddle.com. Scholles, a Dover native and Tuscarawas Central Catholic alum, currently resides in Akron.*