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## Cancer survivors celebrate life

### At urging of motivational speaker, many publicly thank caregivers

By Crystal Garcia  
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Cancer survivors and their families celebrated their lives at the National Cancer Survivors Day program Sunday afternoon in the Walb Ballroom at Indiana University-Purdue University Fort Wayne.

“People need an opportunity to celebrate their lives,” said Dianne May, president and CEO of Cancer Services of Allen County. “The battle of cancer isn’t fought alone and when people can come together with others who are going through a similar thing, it’s very inspirational and meaningful.”

The program was presented by Cancer Services of Allen County, and featured inspirational speaker and songwriter Eric Gnezda and violinist Arkadiy Gips.

“Of all the kinds of programs we do across the country, we genuinely feel privileged to do programs for cancer survivors,” Gnezda said.

Gnezda, of Columbus, Ohio, has been doing cancer survivor programs all over the country for almost 14 years.

He said his brother-in-law and sister are both cancer survivors.

Part of Gnezda’s presentation allowed survivors to publicly thank their caregivers or the people they couldn’t have made it through their treatments without. A few people took advantage of the opportunity to thank friends, family, doctors, God and the staff at Cancer Services.

Gnezda then told a story about Olympic gold medalist Jesse Owens and how Owens almost didn’t qualify for the finals in the 1936 Olympics in Berlin, Germany. Before he was about to make his last attempt in the long jump, a man asked him what he was afraid of and told him how he could make the jump with his eyes closed. The man offered to put a towel about a foot from the jump off point and told Owens that even if he jumped from the new point he would still make the jump to qualify for the finals, and that is what Owens did.

The next day in the finals, Owens was leading until a man beat his best jump and Owens again had one last jump to win. He made the jump and went on to win four gold medals.

The man who won the silver medal in the long jump, Luz Long of Germany, was the man who had given Owens the pep talk that pushed him to qualify in the first place.

Gnezda said there are two kinds of champions: the one who wins the gold and the one who helps the other.

He hopes that after seeing his presentation, cancer survivors and their caregivers will be able to do two things: “First and foremost, celebrate the difficult journey they’ve been on together and second, to be the voice of hope and encouragement to the community.”



Photos by Janelle Sou Roberts/The Journal Gazette

Arkadiy Gips entertains guests with his music during the 2005 National Cancer Survivors’ Day.



Brenda Betley paints Sierra Calvelage’s face during the 2005 National Cancer Survivors’ Day program presented by the Cancer Services of Allen County on Sunday at IPFW.

Fort Wayne resident Shirley Tolbert attended last year’s event and enjoyed it so much she came back this year.

“It helps to boost morale to keep fighting,” said Tolbert, who was diagnosed with a rare form of sarcoma in October 2003.

She plans to attend next year’s celebration if her health allows.

During Gnezda’s presentation, Sweetcakes the Clown entertained children who are cancer survivors or relatives of cancer survivors with balloon hats, flowers and face painting.

Cancer Services of Allen County has presented the program for more than 10 years, said May. Anyone who wants to take part in planning for next year’s event is invited to call Cancer Services of Allen County at 484-9560.