

Del. resident raises brain tumor awareness

Ryan Carroll
SEPTEMBER 23, 2008

Earlier this month, the Kelly Heinz-Grundner Foundation launched the foundation's first campaign, *Get Your Head in the Game*®, which seeks to raise awareness of brain tumors in New Castle County and eventually nationwide.

Chris Grundner, founder and president of the foundation, created the organization in memory of his late wife, Kelly. In October 2004, Grundner, a resident of Wilmington, wrote a business plan for the foundation to honor Kelly one month after she passed away from a malignant brain tumor. He said he realized he had to bring national attention to raise awareness for brain tumors.

"If someone were to tell me that a year after Kelly's passing I would be at a podium announcing the launch of the foundation, I would have thought they were crazy," Grundner said. "I realized pretty quickly that something had to be done, and I was the one who had to do it."

In September 2005, the foundation staged its first annual fundraising event, *Tulips Against Tumors*, which continues to raise money for the foundation by selling tulips each fall. However, the foundation's defining moment was in May when approximately 2,000 people attended the first annual awareness walk in Wilmington. The event raised over \$200,000 for the foundation, he said.

While other brain tumor foundations focus on research and treatment development, the Kelly Heinz-Grundner foundation stresses the importance of awareness and early detection, Grundner said.

"I wanted to put brain tumors on people's radars," he said. "Most parents don't realize that brain cancer is the second leading cancer of people under the age of 20."

Kelly went undiagnosed for six months with her brain tumor, he said. Grundner said he thinks if the tumor were diagnosed earlier, his wife's health could have improved after surgery. However, because she received a late prognosis, her surgery left her confined to a wheelchair.

With the guidance of WH2P, a branding and marketing firm based in Wilmington, *Get Your Head in the Game* is airing radio spots, painting billboards, buying ad space in local magazines and plans to be one of the first nonprofit organizations to have its message present at university football games.

The *Get Your Head in the Game* foundation is also advertising heavily at the Wilmington train station where a floor ad, multiple posters on the platform and a hanging banner in the stairwell showcase the campaign's slogan, "Did You Know?"

Joe Harris, a partner at WH2P, said working with Grundner on the *Get Your Head in the Game* campaign was "destiny." After

meeting through a mutual friend, Harris and Grundner realized they were connected through the cause for raising brain tumor awareness.

"On a personal level, my father had tumor for 30 years and two good friends were brain tumor survivors," Harris said. "When Chris told me his story and goals for the foundation, I was immediately interested."

Four years after meeting, the team launched the *Get Your Head in the Game* campaign and hopes to eventually move it from the county to state level by 2009, and nationwide sometime after.

"You have to crawl before you can walk, and walk before you can run," Grundner said on the foundation's progress.

For the campaign to expand, he said it will require more than personal donations and will need to garner the support of larger corporations. Currently, market research is being done to prove investing in the Kelly Heinz-Grundner foundation is a worthwhile venture for other companies, Grundner said.

Lisa Henry, spokeswoman for Comprehensive Cancer Control, said the foundation has a one-year contract with the Delaware Department of Health and Social Services. The Delaware general assembly approved providing Grundner's organization with a grant.

"In our opinion, people should be aware of all cancers and preventive measures," Henry said.

Grundner said the long-term vision of the campaign hopes to follow in the steps of the Susan B. Komen Foundation, which has been able to raise national breast cancer awareness through what started out as a small foundation.

He said he understands the large amount of work required to achieve what the Susan B. Komen Foundation has in the last 20 years.

The support the campaign requires to grow may come from an expected source. Grundner has recently become a top 10 finalist in Lance Armstrong's *Livestrong Dare* competition, which encourages contestants to explain how they have overcome obstacles in their lives. Having the support of *Livestrong* could be a powerful asset in directing attention and support toward the campaign, he said.

"*Livestrong* would be a great organization to partner with," Grundner said. "If we win the competition, we will get a signed bike from Lance Armstrong, which we will donate to the foundation and raffle off to make money for our family assistance program, which helps families in Delaware who are affected by brain tumors."