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Wellness Community fundraiser honors a friend's memory

By Douglas Webb

Staff writer

MARBLEHEAD - Six local women are paying tribute to the memory of their friend Sue de Vries by raising money in her name for a cause she would have wanted - helping people cope with cancer.

De Vries, a Swampscott resident who formerly lived in Marblehead, died April 20, 2006, after a five-year fight with cancer.

"She was never dying with cancer, she was always living with it," said Judy Karas, a close friend. "She would always encourage people (with cancer) to feel the same way."

Along with Karas, Julie Lipsett (de Vries' sister), Danielle Jacobs, Andrea York, Larisa Forman and Jodi LaPointe make up the board of the Sue de Vries Cancer Foundation, a group committed to following de Vries' example of helping people with cancer. Tomorrow, they are hosting their first fundraiser, with the proceeds going to establish the Wellness Community-Greater Boston on the North Shore and to help fund its new facility in Salem.

The Wellness Community provides free educational and support programs for cancer patients and their loved ones.

"It's just a warm, welcoming place," said Karas, co-president of the foundation.

When de Vries was alive, she had to travel from Marblehead to Newton, the Wellness Community's only location at the time, to attend meetings. The driving took its toll on her, and opening a center on the North Shore was something de Vries wanted to do. Now her friends want to make her wish come true.

On May 1, the Wellness Community will begin to occupy a second-floor space at 76 Lafayette St. in Salem. By the beginning of June, they hope to have it up and running and offering the same services that the one in Newton offers.

Karas, who has volunteered at the center in Newton, has seen firsthand the effect the Wellness Community has had on people's life.

"My friend's father is in the hospital," she said. "His father's wife is meeting weekly at the Wellness Center, and it's helping her tremendously."

The Sue de Vries Cancer Foundation has signed an agreement to help fund the new center in Salem. The fundraiser this weekend is only the first of what they hope will be many.

The evening is titled "White Night for Wellness." Those attending will dress in white. It will take place at the Corinthian Yacht Club in Marblehead and feature dinner, music, and a live and silent auction.

Some of the high-end items are a tour of the set of the HBO show "Entourage," Green Monster tickets at Fenway, Sox/Yankees box seat tickets, tickets to "Late Show With David Letterman," a night and a dinner at the Four Seasons in Boston, and a Boston Celtics package that includes tickets to a game, a chance to be ball

boy and assist the players in warm-ups, and an autographed team ball.

If you go

\* What: Dinner, music and auction

\* Where: Corinthian Yacht Club, 1 Nathan St., Marblehead

\* When: Tomorrow, 7 p.m. to midnight

\* Cost: Donations starting at \$125 per person

\* To benefit: Sue de Vries Foundation