

## Taking Steps To Help And Heal

**Event to raise money for cancer foundation**

By EMILY SACHS, Staff Writer

RIALTO - Anthony Nickols had dreams that extended far beyond the Duarte hospital bed where the 18-year-old spent weeks undergoing full-body radiation.

There was a black Ford Mustang with a rear spoiler. A dog. And all the foods that he couldn't eat while on a liquid diet.

He got the brand-new Mustang. Even got to drive it a few times. And doctors relaxed their strict rules about his low-immune system, allowing him to get a boxer he named Sheva.

When it came to her son, Patricia Nickols spared no expense.

If a mother whose only son has cancer can be called fortunate, she was. As the executive director of San Bernardino County's Community Services Department, she had the finances and freedom to make her son's last days bearable.

"We did whatever we could do," she said. "We didn't want him to want for anything."

So many other families in the same predicament have far less to spare.

On Saturday, Patricia Nickols hopes hundreds of people will come together to raise money to help families cope with cancer at the Anthony J. Nickols Jr. Walk for Life at Eisenhower High School in Rialto.

The 5K walk about three miles will benefit the Candlelighters Childhood Cancer Foundation of the Inland Empire, which helps families with everything from education and transportation to wigs and groceries.

Proceeds also will benefit the Anthony J. Nickols Jr. Foundation and a new college scholarship at Eisenhower High.

Anthony Nickols was a senior at Eisenhower in fall 1997 when he was diagnosed with non-Hodgkin's Lymphoma, a cancer of the lymphatic system, which is part of the immune system.

The cancer is the third most common type of childhood cancer and can spread throughout the body, making it difficult to treat and often fatal. It is also hard to detect.

Anthony Nickols had few, if any, symptoms. His mother said the cancer was found in blood work for a routine physical.

The cancer was in the advanced stage when he was diagnosed. What followed was a series of hospitalizations and chemotherapy treatments. His tumors weren't shrinking, so doctors ordered a bone marrow transplant from his sister Latasha.

On Jan. 14, 1999, the boy who showed age-defying strength and character during his illness, died from pneumonia and other effects of cancer. He was 19.



*Rodrigo Pena/Staff Photographer*

Patricia Nickols, 48, of Loma Linda talks to Penny Lilburn, co-host of "Inland Empire Live" on KCSB-TV, about the walkathon she is planning in memory of her son, Anthony J. Nickols Jr., who died of cancer in 1999.

Patricia Nickols returned to work soon after and became a board member for the Arrowhead United Way and the Candlelighters. She also began raising money for cancer research in her son's name.

"I just knew if I stopped, I wouldn't go forward," she said. "Anthony wouldn't have liked that."

Her family's efforts have already raised thousands of dollars, most for research for the City of Hope in Duarte, where Anthony Nickols got his treatment.

Saturday's event is a way of bringing Patricia Nickols' efforts closer to home and also assisting families who are going through the same experience. It will include a free health and fitness fair, featuring information and screenings.

Students from Eisenhower High School will prepare a pancake breakfast after the walk. Dan Rentz, the school's activities director, said he hopes to see students walk to help raise money.

Candlelighters relies on private donations to help families, said Executive Director Armida Kersey.

Two golf tournaments last year raised \$32,000. The annual Brianna Cadman Memorial Kids' Walk in September raised \$12,000 last year. Three hundred people walked.

"We don't do a lot of fund raising. We have a small staff," Kersey said. "If people do it for us, we definitely encourage it."

Patricia Nickols said she wants to raise awareness about childhood cancer and use her son's story to help raise money for research and aid.

"If more moms would go out and say 'This is happening,' more people would learn about childhood cancer," said Kersey, who hopes the event becomes an annual fund-raiser for her group.

Nickols, by the way, still has her son's dog. And the Mustang.

She drives it every day. The custom license plates read "Anthony N."