

14 Days for Gloria

New Braunfels comes together for fundraiser and ALS awareness event



Every day from February 1 through February 14, participants walked 2.4 miles through New Braunfels to increase ALS awareness and to raise money to support Gloria Herfurth, an administrative assistant for New Braunfels Fire Department who was recently diagnosed with ALS.

Gloria Herfurth, an administrative assistant for New Braunfels Fire Department, was diagnosed with ALS (Lou Gehrig's disease) in December 2011. It was a lot for her, and for those of us who know her, to grasp and move on with. It didn't take long for the bills and expenses to start piling up—a terminal illness can be expensive to diagnose and begin treating. So a few of us at the department got together and hatched an idea to raise some money for Gloria. Originally we thought of a walk across Texas—Brownsville to the Panhandle, just short of 900 miles—but we soon realized it was logistically unfeasible. So we said we'd make it a "community thing." We knew the community would come together to help support one of its citizens and servants. Together, we decided on 14 Days for Gloria, a fundraiser and ALS awareness event.

We rallied our organizations and associations, including the New Braunfels Professional Fire Fighters Association, the New Braunfels Fire Fighters Pipes and Drums and the New Braunfels Fire Fighters Women's Auxiliary. And we pitched it to the shifts, to the department as a whole and to the city. Everyone responded with enthusiasm and a "we need to do this" attitude.

We began making fliers and scouting a suitable location to gather for the walks we had planned (we ended up choosing New Braunfels Coffee on the Plaza). We decided on two walks, morning and

noon, every day for 14 days. We went to the papers (the Herald and the Citizen), the radio and city email; we went to businesses. Eventually Lisa Morris, an event organizer and fundraiser, and her company, Be Nice Express, volunteered to help. She really pulled in the business community to help us, and those businesses helped us achieve more as a fundraiser than we ever could have thought possible. Mark Eliot created a web page, and James Sellers made a Facebook page. He and Pipes and Drums set up an account for 14Gloria. Wendy Wehman seemed inexhaustible at printing fliers and creating donation buckets.

On February 1 we had a kickoff at the bandstand on the main plaza. Representative Doug Miller (R, Dist. 73) spoke from personal experience: his wife's mother had passed away from ALS. Pipes and Drums played, and everyone was in awe (because they are awesome). Chief John Robinson spoke, Stacy Zercher spoke fondly of Gloria and their 20-year association and friendship and others shared their thoughts. Radio KGNB broadcast live from the event and the New Braunfels Citizen's editor-in-chief Mike Reynolds was there to report in person. Of course, the Fire Department was there, as were Julia Dyer and Bonnie Walsh (and company) from the ALS Association Texas Chapter.

Gloria was fighting tears during the ceremony, but her husband Glen

supported her with an arm around her shoulders. Surrounded by her loving family and looking out at everyone who had gathered to prove that Gloria wasn't alone, she must have felt the effects of the medicine of the best kind.

Nathan Dekens, firefighter, took off work to be there every day to walk. Stacy Zercher did too, to walk and stay at the coffee shop to oversee the silent auction items. Permission to set up headquarters and additional generous support came from Lauren and Nadir Farhoudi, owners of New Braunfels Coffee. Every day on-duty firefighters or firefighters just going off duty walked the 2.4 miles to Landa Park and back. Representative Miller's wife, Anne, participated almost every day, as did Beverly, the fire chief's wife. Many participants showed the strong commitment it took to walk all 14 days. So many people deserve so much credit, and it was so very inspiring and incredible to see, experience and be a part of.

Now that it's over, we can claim a fantastic success, with more than \$18,000 raised. And, based on a rough count of all the daily participants multiplied by the miles each one walked, we walked across Texas—and a little more! It was a wonderful homage to someone so very incredible, kind and caring, our lovely Gloria.

The website, www.14gloria.com, is still up, so is the face book page, 14gloria, and donations continue to be welcomed.

— Robert Garcia, EMT-P/Engineer