



BREAKING CHARGERS BLOW LATE CHANGE, LOSE IN OT (/NEWS/2013/NOV/03/NFL-CHARGERS-REDSKINS-GAME/)

HEALTH

Going over the edge for brain cancer research

Deborah Sullivan Brennan • U-T 08:20p.m. Nov 2, 2013



DOWNTOWN SAN DIEGO — A year after her diagnosis with brain cancer, marathon runner Monika Allen plunged 29 stories from the Manchester Grand Hyatt Saturday to help fund a cure for the condition.

Allen, 35, of San Diego, was one of 60 “edgers” who rappelled from the downtown San Diego high-rise in a fundraiser this weekend that organizers say will raise about \$150,000 for brain cancer research. Other participants included American Idol winner David Cook, who lost a brother, Adam, to brain cancer, and Bob Carter, chief of neurosurgery for the UC San Diego School of Medicine.

Participants pledged to raise at least \$1,500 each for the cause in order to rappel off the building. As of Saturday, the

“I think this event shows that brain cancer doesn’t stop your life,” said Allen, who said she was diagnosed with inoperable brain cancer in September of last year, and has undergone surgery and chemotherapy since then.

Over the Edge for Brain Cancer was sponsored by the nonprofit Accelerate Brain Cancer Cure, which raises money to support research on diagnosis and treatment of the disease, and matches basic research institutions with biotechnology companies to speed development of new tests and therapies.

“We joke that we’re bio-yentas,” said the organization’s CEO Max Wallace, who also took the plunge Saturday.

The products of those matches are clinical trials for new drugs, better testing techniques and anti-cancer vaccines. The therapies tested in those trials include cutting-edge techniques such as genetic sequencing of tumors and serendipitous findings, including a routine anti-pinworm medication that shows promise for tumor suppression.

Kicking off the event was Cook, who descended 365 feet down San Diego’s tallest waterfront building before performing at the Griffin Saturday night.

“After losing my brother in 2009, any time I can make a fool out of myself for a good cause I’m willing to do it,” he said.

Viewers cheered as he emerged from a balcony on the 33rd floor and then slowly crept down the wall.

“I was more calm up there than I am now,” he confessed after landing on a fourth-floor patio. “I knew why I wanted to do that. It’s obviously very important to me. Now that I’m on the other end I can acknowledge how crazy it was.”

For Allen and her friend, fellow brain cancer survivor and triathlete BethAnn Telford, the event was yet another test of endurance.

Telford, of Fairfax, Va., was diagnosed with an inoperable brain tumor eight years ago, after hearing a loud popping noise in her head during the Marine Corps Marathon in 2005. Since then she has kept the disease at bay while raising a half-million dollars for research on the condition. Her inspiration, she said, are pediatric brain cancer patients, including several who watched her descend the wall.

“If I go over a building for kids, they find that more entertaining than running a marathon,” she said. “I have three little kids down there that understand what I am doing. They’re in the battle of their lives.”

One of those was 6-year-old Max Wilford of Orange County, who was diagnosed with brain cancer two years ago, and attended the event with his family.

Although Telford aimed to help assuage his fears about brain cancer, she also dispelled his fears about climbing down tall buildings. Max’s mother, Audra Wilford, had told him that the edgers would soar down the building like Spiderman, so he was a little surprised to see them creep down slowly, tethered to climbing ropes.

“The people weren’t scary,” he said.

deborah.brennan@utsandiego.com (760) 529-4941 Twitter: @utbrennan