

Mini Relay For Life gets seniors 'walkering, wheeling' for cancer cause



[Marie Wilson](#) [News updated:](#) 6/22/2018 8:28 AM

Relay For Life is usually an all-night thing.

It's the type of event where participants head to a track somewhere and walk, walk, walk -- doing laps for hours in support of cancer patients and survivors assisted by the [American Cancer Society](#).

But this week in Naperville, Relay For Life got an age-appropriate twist for about 75 senior citizens and their relatives, who joined in the fourth annual Mini Relay For Life at [Naperville Senior Center Adult Day Services](#).



James Dunphy of Naperville walks with Naperville Senior Center employee Courtney Sutherland during the fourth annual Mini Relay For Life on Wednesday. The event raised \$5,232 for the American Cancer Society.

Mark Black / Staff Photographer

Instead of a 12-hour overnighter, the Mini Relay lasted eight days at participants' leisure, allowing members to walk a few feet or a few laps anytime from June 13 to 20, said Mike Cooper, who co-owns the facility with his wife, Pam.

"The goal that we had was that our members would be able to participate in a community event," Cooper said about the 42 older adults who attend the facility each week for socialization, exercise, activities and lunch during the day. "It's been appreciated by the members because they don't get to give back. They're kind of isolated in their homes."

At the senior center, though, there are programs and games designed to bring back engagement in a community setting. Among these features of the facility, which opened in 2015 at 1504 N. Naper Blvd., Suite 120, is an indoor walking track totaling a distance of 100 feet.

During the eight-day duration of the Mini Relay, Cooper said participants walked 1,261 laps for a total of roughly 25 miles.

But "walk," for this relay, was a relative term.



Elaine Merkowitz of Warrenville walks with Naperville Senior Center co-owner Pam Cooper on Wednesday during the fourth annual Mini Relay For Life. Walking, "walkering and wheeling" all counted for laps as seniors circled the center's 100-foot track.

Mark Black | Staff Photographer

Participants were "walking and wheeling" around the track, too, using walkers, canes or wheelchairs for assistance. During the concluding event when families also attended, the population of those walking in the traditional sense increased.

"We had three wheelchairs, a bunch of walkers and a whole bunch of walkees," Cooper said.

The event raised \$5,232 -- a record amount -- and it brought the four-year total to \$17,239 donated to the cancer cause.



Mary Hemmerle and her husband Irvin of Naperville participate in the Naperville Senior Center's fourth annual Mini Relay For Life. The event helps members of the senior center give back to a community cause, despite challenges for some including limited mobility or isolation. *Mark Black / Staff Photographer*

As he has each year, Cooper concluded the ceremony by turning down the lights and turning the focus to small paper bags containing glow sticks and positive messages or names of loved ones lost to cancer. This year for the first time, he said he read the names of 55 special remembrances submitted by members and their relatives.

"It was really beautiful," Cooper said.



Luminarias with special messages were set up around the small track at the Naperville Senior Center on Wednesday during the conclusion of the fourth annual Mini Relay For Life. The relay has raised a total of \$17,239 for the American Cancer Society since it started. *Mark Black | Staff Photographer*

About Naperville Senior Center, Adult Day Services

Naperville Senior Center, a family owned business opened in 2015, provides peace of mind and coaching for caregivers, as well as dozens of activities and exercises for their family members. Owners Pam Cooper, Physical Therapist, and Mike Cooper, Certified Caregiver Consultant, along with their specialized staff of Activity Coordinator, Registered Nurses and Certified Nurse Assistants, plan and lead enjoyable activities for seniors throughout the day designed around their Members' interests, abilities and needs. Naperville Senior Center Members vocalize, theorize, harmonize, evangelize and sometimes even close their eyes, but most importantly socialize and exercise.

For more information, and to schedule a free trial, please call (630) 857-3017, or visit www.napervilleseniorcenter.com .