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YOUR NEIGHBOR COLUMN

FWAACA seeking members, donations

Nonprofit advocates for cancer prevention for the medically under-served.

By Evelyn Frierson



Evelyn Frierson is executive director of the Fort Wayne African American Cancer Alliance. Your Neighbor is written by a representative of a nonprofit or community group and appears frequently in Neighbors.

The Fort Wayne African American Cancer Alliance (FWAACA) was founded in 1996 by a few women who determined that adequate support was not available for persons of color when facing the challenges associated with cancer. One true realization was that cancer is not a death sentence, and one can go on to live a productive life after the diagnosis, although there are some adjustments that must occur.

I can speak to that with my own cancer experience occurring in 2000, just prior to my 40th birthday. I couldn't believe the diagnosis. I actually believe I was numb initially, wondering how this could have happened. My son, Kenny, at that time was only 9. I couldn't imagine not being available to raise my "miracle baby." I had already been told for years I wouldn't be able to have children and, after a very large tumor was removed from my ovaries in 1989, I was able to conceive.

Cancer had been in my life for many years. Having watched several foster parents succumb to the disease, I felt as though I was doomed. Cancer in the black community continues to be at an all-time high for incidence and death rates. Many of the causes stem directly from lifestyle choices such as diet, physical inactivity, and excessive alcohol and tobacco use, to name a few. Being poor also contributes to health disparities among blacks.

Unfortunately, an adequate diet, living in a community that one would feel safe walking in (for physical activity) and having access to quality health care are synonymous with middle and upper class. It is difficult to make healthy choices when it is cost-prohibitive.

FWAACA exists to educate, advocate and collaborate for the prevention and early detection of cancer in the African American and medically under-served communities. We have been in this community for over 10 years, providing education on better nutrition choices and improving lifestyles. All our programs are nationally tested best practices from notable organizations, and they are designed specifically for at-risk populations.

In January, FWAACA received its Advanced Ruling from the Internal Revenue Service, recognizing us as a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization. This comes at a noteworthy time for FWAACA as we have embarked on many new projects out of our recently donated office space from St. Joseph Medical Group in the Lafayette Medical Center.

A Prevention Clinic through a significant collaboration between FWAACA and the Allen County Health Disparity Coalition in January 2006.

More recently, FWAACA has developed a Resource Room, which offers a wealth of information on several health issues as well as Internet access and support to those in need of direction and guidance to manage their disease, weight or other health-related concerns.

Now we're in need of our community's monetary support.

FWAACA recently received a matching grant challenge from St. Joseph Community Health Foundation that will match \$2 for every \$1 raised in either memberships or donations.

Annual membership fees for an individual range from \$10 to \$100; lifetime memberships are available at \$250. Company memberships begin at \$50 for a small business or nonprofit organization. There are benefits associated with each membership fee. The board of directors has begun making phone calls to friends and family members to solicit donations and memberships from the community to support FWAACA.

Funding for our organization is critical to our survival. We have to step away from grant dependency and move into diversification of funding.

We don't have a problem spending money for things we want; FWAACA is an organization we need!

Learn more

More information about the Fort Wayne African American Cancer Alliance is available online at www.fwaaca.com or you may call 399-6461 for more details. FWAACA is located at 2700 S. Lafayette St. in the lower level of Lafayette Medical Center. Office hours are 9 a.m.-3 p.m. Monday-Friday.

Write a Your Neighbor

To submit a column about your organization or event, e-mail neighbors@news-sentinel.com. Include your photograph as an attachment in JPEG (.jpg) format. Submissions may be mailed to Neighbors/The News-Sentinel, PO Box 102, Fort Wayne, IN 46801. Call 461-8261 or 461-8347 for assistance.