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Victoria Mitchell, editor
(248) 349-1700, ext. 102
vemitchell@gannett.com

MY NEIGHBORS

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Novi teen fights back in cancer battle

■ **Youngest chairwoman for Relay For Life of Novi**

By **Holly Bowne**
SPECIAL WRITER

For some Novi High School seniors, maintaining honor roll status, working as a captain of their sports team and applying for colleges would be enough to keep anyone busy. But 17-year-old Lainy Sekuloski decided to add a few more items to her 2008 agenda.

She is not only captain of The Pavement Pounders, but is also Luminaria chairperson for the upcoming American Cancer Society's Relay For Life of Novi.

The annual 24-hour event takes place June 7-8 at Novi Middle School, and is designed to raise awareness and funding to fight cancer.

"Lainy is someone who has purple blood," joked Barb Iovan, community representative for the American Cancer Society. "She is inspired for the fight (against cancer). She just takes it on and often puts the rest of us to shame."

Sekuloski's desire to fight the disease started when her 42-year-old mother, Mary, was diagnosed with breast cancer five years ago.

After completing treatment, she discovered the cancer had metastasized in her liver, and has been courageously battling since then.

In response, Sekuloski joined a Relay For Life team.

Her sophomore year of high school, she captained a team of her own; and this year, she's the youngest chairwoman on staff, running the Luminaria Committee.

"I originally told Lainy this is my fight," Mary Sekuloski said. "But this is her labor of love. I'm so proud she is doing this."

The Luminaria Committee sells white paper bags to be decorated in honor of someone who battled or is currently battling cancer. They are filled with sand and a candle for an evening Luminaria Ceremony during the event.

This past November, Sekuloski attended the Relay For Life Great Lakes Summit in Indiana and learned the theme for this year's event would be "Celebrate. Remember. Fight Back."

"The Fight Back Ceremony is new this year," she said. "The Remembrance Ceremony with the Luminaria Bags is more emotional, then the Fight Back Ceremony will be empowering."

Sekuloski and her team, The Pavement Pounders, successfully raised \$7,800 in 2007.

Sekuloski received the Team Captain of the Year award for her efforts.

This year, The Pavement Pounders have set the ambitious goal of raising \$10,000.

When asked how she plans to accomplish this, Sekuloski bursts with ideas.

Aside from traditional methods like bake sales and donation requests, one of the more unique ways is her "You Have Been Flocked by Relay For Life"

• **To join The Pavement Pounders team, or to make a donation, go to:**
<http://relay.acsevents.org>
(<http://relay.acsevents.org>)

• **To participate in the "You Have Been Flocked by Relay For Life" fundraiser, contact Lainy Sekuloski at (248) 974-3782 or by e-mail at:**
SportyChika567@aol.com).

• **To volunteer with the Relay For Life of Novi event, contact Barb Iovan, Community Representative for the American Cancer Society, at (248) 663-3436, or by e-mail at:**
Barb.Iovan@cancer.org.

fundraiser.

Sekuloski has 50 pink plastic flamingos. For a \$10 donation, someone can arrange for her to "flock" a friend's or neighbor's yard during the night.

It then costs the person \$5 to make the flamingos fly away, and an extra \$5 if they want to send them to someone else.

"Last year was a huge hit and the flamingos flew to almost every house in my subdivision," Sekuloski said.

She's inspired when hearing all the positive results from previous years' donations.

In 2007 the money raised



Photo by Holly Bowne

Lainy Sekuloski, 17, and her mother, Mary, fight the battle against cancer together.

helped introduce seven new FDA-approved chemotherapy drugs.

One of those drugs, Tykerb, is currently being used by Sekuloski's mother in her treatment.

While most participants walk around the track during the 24-hour relay, as a cross-country team captain, Sekuloski plans to run for part of it.

"We run because we are running for her," Sekuloski laughed, refer-

ring to herself and members of The Pavement Pounders who are also on Novi's cross-country team.

Sekuloski plans to continue running in college, as she has received an academic and athletic full-ride scholarship to the University of St. Francis in Illinois. She plans to pursue something in the medical field, maybe even focusing on oncology.

But for now, Sekuloski is con-

tent to get the most out of her senior year at Novi High School, while continuing to volunteer with the American Cancer Society.

"I don't want any family to go through what my family has gone through," she said. "Sometimes I feel helpless. A lot of people close to me have lost loved ones, and this is a way I feel I can help."