**Kickin’ Cancer: A Local Mission of Hope, Help, and Heart**

Cancer is a word that changes lives in an instant. In Redwood County, it’s a reality that touches nearly every family, whether through personal diagnosis or standing beside loved ones through their battles. That shared experience is exactly why a dedicated group of local residents decided to step up and create Kickin’ Cancer—a homegrown, community-based organization determined to bring meaningful support, compassion, and hope right to their neighbors’ doorsteps.

Kickin’ Cancer grew out of years of participating in the Relay for Life of Redwood County. While Relay for Life and the American Cancer Society have long done incredible work, their structure meant that funds raised here often left the area, with only a portion coming back based on broader assessments of need. After many heartfelt discussions, the local volunteers who had poured so much time and energy into Relay for Life made the decision to start something new—something truly centered on Redwood County residents. The result was Kickin’ Cancer, a program built from the ground up by people who’ve organized, cheered, cried, and walked alongside cancer fighters and survivors for years. Their founding board included longtime leaders like Char Burgemeister, Roger Pabst, Sherry Brandt, Nancy Hansen, Cheryl Gewerth, Sheri Madsen, Stephanie Cornwell, Cindy Moldan, and Christie Rudenick—individuals whose dedication laid the groundwork for this new chapter.

From the very beginning, the mission of Kickin’ Cancer has been clear. As Christie Rudenick, the organization’s president, shared, “Running this organization has taught me the value of patience, perspective, and the power of community. It’s made me pause and truly reflect on how deeply cancer impacts every part of our lives—not just physically, but emotionally and financially as well. I’ve always carried the mindset that it wasn’t a matter of if I’d be affected by cancer, but when. That became a reality when both my sister, my dad, and I received our own diagnoses in the span of five years. This journey has shown me just how important it is to have support, understanding, and hope. It’s why I’m so passionate about helping others through theirs.” That heartfelt motivation is the beating heart of Kickin’ Cancer. The group exists to walk beside neighbors through every step of the cancer journey whether by offering financial relief, delivering small comforts through Blessing Bags, or simply being a listening ear.

One of the standout ways Kickin’ Cancer makes a difference is through the Kickin’ Cancer Support (KCS) Program, a local initiative specifically created to ease the financial burden that cancer often brings. When the program began in 2022, it offered up to $500 in support each year. But as needs grew and community generosity swelled, Kickin’ Cancer has proudly tripled that figure. Today, Redwood County residents undergoing active treatment, including chemotherapy, radiation, surgery, lymphedema therapy, hospice, or palliative care, can receive up to $1,500 per year to help cover critical expenses. The types of costs covered are broad and practical, ranging from mortgage and rent payments to utility bills, out-of-pocket medical supplies, wigs, counseling, and even fitness memberships that aid in physical and emotional recovery. Applicants simply fill out a form either online at kickin-cancer.org or by printing a paper version and submit it to the Redwood Area Communities Foundation. Each application is reviewed confidentially by the KCS committee. If approved, checks are issued directly to creditors, taking weight off families’ shoulders at exactly the moments they need it most.

Beyond financial help, Kickin’ Cancer knows how powerful it is to feel remembered and cared for. That’s why they’ve developed their Blessing Bag program. These thoughtfully prepared packages include items like cozy socks, lap blankets, toothbrushes, crosswords, journals, gum, fuzzy socks, and gift cards. They’re meant to bring a smile and remind recipients they aren’t alone. As one local woman shared after receiving hers shortly after beginning chemotherapy, she broke down in tears, overwhelmed not just by the contents, but by knowing someone cared enough to send it. Caregivers too have felt the relief these small gestures bring. One caregiver told the team that a simple gas card included in their Blessing Bag meant they could get to and from treatment appointments without wondering how they’d pay for fuel that week.

Kickin’ Cancer also invests deeply in fostering emotional connections through events like their annual celebration at Gilfillan Estate. This gathering is more than a fundraiser; it’s a chance to honor survivors, remember those lost, and stand together as a community. The day is filled with family-friendly fun: food stands, games, train rides, balloon art, popcorn, and more. But the most moving moments often come at night. During a touching ceremony, each survivor is recognized by name and by the number of years they’ve been cancer-free. Then, a survivor lap circles the grounds, followed by luminaries glowing in the dark to honor lives touched by cancer. It’s a time for reflection, tears, hope, and above all, solidarity.

Throughout the year, Kickin’ Cancer stays busy partnering with other local organizations and businesses to raise both funds and awareness. From Pizza Ranch Tip Nights to participating in community parades, collaborating with Renville County Walk in the Park for Tackle Cancer, and benefiting from Runnings Ladies Night in Redwood Falls, their partnerships show how wide the community’s arms stretch. They’re also hosting their final Survivor Social of the year on October 13 at The Spot in Morgan, one more way to bring survivors together to share stories, find encouragement, and build lasting bonds.

The power behind all these efforts is the incredible generosity and involvement of local people. Kickin’ Cancer actively reaches out to businesses across Redwood County with sponsorship letters and donation forms, but anyone can give in a number of ways. Donations can be dropped off at Minnwest Bank in downtown Redwood Falls, RACF in Redwood Falls, or F&M Bank in Morgan. They can also be mailed to RACF, Attn: Kickin’ Cancer, P.O. Box 481, Redwood Falls, MN 56283. Online contributions are easy too—just visit givemn.org/story/Kickincancer. Every gift, whether large or small, goes straight back into supporting Redwood County residents who are in the midst of their cancer fight.

Volunteers are just as vital as donations. Kickin’ Cancer has countless opportunities for people to get involved, from assembling Blessing Bags and writing kind notes to patients, to helping plan and run events or serving on the Board of Directors. There’s truly a role for everyone, young or old, with a few spare hours or a passion to take on more. As they look to the future, Kickin’ Cancer hopes to continue expanding the resources they offer, including exploring new initiatives like providing radon testing kits and even developing a scholarship program.

For anyone in Redwood County who hears the life-altering words “you have cancer,” Kickin’ Cancer wants to be the first to say: you are not alone. Their team—made up of people who’ve been there themselves—stands ready to help with financial burdens, offer a warm blanket or listening ear, and remind every person facing cancer that there’s an entire community here that cares. To learn more, apply for support, volunteer, or donate, visit kickin-cancer.org or follow them on Facebook. Together, Redwood County is proving that when it comes to fighting cancer, nobody has to walk this path alone.