

3,000 walk in Relay for Life

BY MICHELLE L. START
Correspondent

Learning their then 2-year-old son Ethan had acute lymphoblastic leukemia was like being run over by a Mack truck, said Sean and Jennifer Hoover.

"You're speechless," said Sean Hoover, 31, a Fort Myers police officer. "I was up all night. We had been to the doctor's several times. He kept dismissing it. He said the bruising was just boys being boys, playing rough. One day I was at home with the kids and my wife was at work, he woke up from a nap and was screaming in pain. He had a temperature of 104. This time we

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saw a different pediatric doctor because it was short notice. This one used to be an oncologist and he knew right away something was wrong. That night Ethan was hospitalized for seven days and diagnosed with cancer."

Sean Hoover's first question was whether the disease was fatal. The family was given a booklet, explaining what to expect. His second question was whether Ethan's twin sister, Sydney, also had it. She doesn't.

Thirteen months later, Ethan and his family were among more than 500 survivors and 3,000 participants who attended

the American Cancer Society's 10th annual Relay for Life in Fort Myers this past weekend, according to survivor chairwoman Beth Hayes. She said there were 123 teams participating this year.

Sick and moody from his chemotherapy



PHOTO MICHELLE L. START

Two-year-old Ethan Hoover gets a hug from his mom Jennifer Hoover at the recent Relay for Life. Ethan has survived Leukemia and walked in the American Cancer Event last week in Fort Myers.

and steroid medications, Ethan Hoover, now 3, had to be carried for the survivor lap. Sydney lingered by her brother's side, trying to cheer him up. The family has two years left of treatment and four more until Ethan will be considered cured.

Sean Hoover has since become something of an advocate for cancer research in the community. When Ethan was diag-



PHOTO MICHELLE L. START

People of all ages were among the 3,000 participants in this year's Relay for Life in Fort Myers

nosed, he pledged to raise \$5,000 to fight the disease. Instead, with the help of community members and fellow police officers, the Hoover family raised \$7,600.

"We've done bake sales, raffles," Sean Hoover said. "We've been asking people for money. We had baskets made up. At work, we sold gold ribbons, the symbol for childhood cancer, for \$2 each and then we put them up all around work. We asked for donations. Businesses have been very generous."

The money raised by the Hoover fam-

ily will help the American Cancer Society reach this year's goal of \$495,000. Last year teams raised \$485,000.

Relay for Life began in the mid-1980s after a Washington colorectal surgeon wanted to enhance the income of his local American Cancer Society. He decided to raise money by running marathons. In May 1985, he spent 25 hours circling a track for more than 83 miles and raised \$27,000.

In 1986, 19 teams took part in the first team relay event on the track and raised \$33,000. ■



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