## Survivor inspired to strengthen fight against cancer

Jason Maltzman was still mourning the loss of his friend Alex Graham to cancer when the disease attacked another loved

unecase attacked another loved one—his mother.
About 13 months after Gra-ham, then a West Bloomfield High School student, passed away, Claudia Maltzman of Farmington Hills learned in February 2000 she had breast cancer.

cancer.

The hardest thing about the ordeal, she said, was telling her son, other family members and friends.

"It's devastating to go home and tell your family and friends and draw them into this nightmare," she said.

\*\*Matternage immediately began

mare," she said.

Maltzman immediately began
chemotherapy treatments, which
forced her to stop working as a
first-grade teacher at Spencer
Elementary School in Brighton.
The treatments caused intense
fatigue, lack of appetite, dehydration and many aches and
pains.

pains.
"There would be days I'd climb into bed and be unable to get up for five days," Maltzman said. "The treatments were really

tough on my body.

But now, the future looks good for Mattzman. Inspired by Alex's never-quit attitude and motivated by the thought of life after treatment, Maltzman is cancer free and will be ready to return to the classroom next fall.

"There's no guarantees, but right now I'm totally in remission, 'she said.

Fueled by her initial recovery and returning energy, Maltzman will join hundreds of people teaming up to raise thousands of dollars for the American Cancer Society at West Bloomfield High School this weekend.

Relay for Life will use families and volunteers from several southern Oakland County communities who will walk around the school's track from non Saturday to noon Sunday, Sponsors the walkers enlist will raise money for cancer research.

Alex's parents, Bill and Susio Graham, are co-chairing this growing, third-annual West Bloomfield event. Last yoar, it raised \$132,000; this year, organizers hope to collect \$185,000 and keep the local relay biggest among the many similar fundraisers throughout metro Detroit.

"More important than the money, we just want people to come out and support this event, Susie Graham said. To attract spectators, WBHS will have a festival-like atmosphere with face painting, yoga lessons, concession stands, band performances and karaoke. For those impacted by cancer, several medical and cancer experts will be on hand Saturday afternoon to answer questions, and a luminary ceremony will take place Saturday ovening to remember cancer victims who died.

At dusk, luminary candles purchased in honor of cancer victims will be placed around the track and in the stands to spell out the word 'hope." The effort makes a visual spectacle easily seen from Orchard Lake Road.

As the event grows, Susie Graham said she's more alarmed a how many young people are having to battle cancer. Cancer claimed her daughter in January 1999, and the disease ended the life of Alex's closs friend, Julie Wirthlin of Bloomfield, last year.

This year, Susie Graham is talking about Matt Lash, and North Farmington High School

support for Relay For Life,

alum attending Michigan State University, Lash is battling bone cancer that required part of his leg be amputated. He has lost his hair from chemotherapy treatments, but friends have shaved their heads to support his recovery efforts.

"As I hear more of these stories, I get more concerned," Susic said at her West Bloomfield store, Greetings From ..., which has become a comfort ground for people touched by cancer who want to talk to Graham.

"It's and to see so many children impacted by can-cer, but we have a lot of (walk-ing) teams formed by the fami-lies and friends of these patients," she added. "That's what makes this event grow and it all increases awareness."

Graham (left), the

owner of Greetings

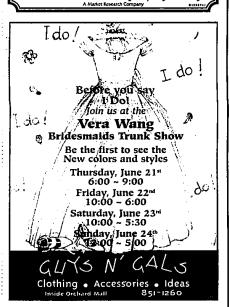
in West Bloom-field, and Claudia Maltzman of Farm.

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