



# The RACE to CHASE CANCER AWAY

Through fundraising events, women run, walk, and bike their way toward a cure.

By Laurie Wertich

**E**very August for the past 16 years, Ellen Freeman Roth, a writer from Massachusetts, has pedaled nearly 200 miles from Sturbridge to Provincetown as part of the Pan-Mass Challenge (PMC), an annual bike-a-thon that raises more money for charity than any other single athletic fundraising event in the country.

Ellen Freeman Roth  
photo: Bob Jenney



Though the physical accomplishment is considerable, the event is more than just a bike ride for Ellen: it's part pilgrimage, part fundraiser, part group hug, and part ritual. At the end of her first day of riding, she'll pause, with about 300 other riders, in the city of Bourne for a champagne toast and a Living Proof photo—because these survivors are proof that there is life after cancer.

Ellen lost her mother to ovarian cancer and her aunt to breast cancer. Both women died at a very young age; as a result, Ellen spent most of her life feeling helpless in the face of cancer—until age 39, when she underwent genetic testing and learned that she carried the BRCA1 mutation, which put her at high risk for both ovarian and breast cancer. Armed with this information, she knew she could remain vigilant about screening and prevention and take steps, such as prophylactic surgery, to reduce her risk.

In a twist of fate, as Ellen was making arrangements to have her ovaries removed she learned

## Choosing the Event That's Right for You

There are so many events designed to make a difference in the fight against cancer that it can be daunting to choose where to participate. If you're ready to lace up your running shoes or hop on a bike, here are a few things to consider:

**WHAT IS YOUR FITNESS LEVEL?** If you're a seasoned athlete, you may choose from any number of events; however, if you're new to endurance events, an organization like Team in Training can help you train and get to the starting line and beyond.

**DO YOU CARE WHERE THE MONEY GOES?** Most events provide detailed information about where the funds are applied—so whether you want to support cancer research or cancer programs and services, you can choose accordingly.

**HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT FUNDRAISING?** If you are not comfortable asking people for money, choose an event that simply requires an entry fee.

**WHAT IS YOUR WHY?** Are you running for a loved one or for yourself? What do you want out of the event? Do you want to simply raise money, or do you want to be part of something larger?

## Ready to Fundraise?

Here are just a few of the many events that raise funds for cancer.

### Team in Training

[teamintraining.org](http://teamintraining.org)

Team in Training offers an opportunity for both rookies and seasoned athletes to train for and participate in a marathon, half marathon, triathlon, century ride, or adventure hike. In exchange for fundraising, participants undergo a four- to five-month training program, in person or online, for one of more than 200 endurance events.

### Team LiveSTRONG

[livestrong.org](http://livestrong.org)

Join Team LiveSTRONG to participate in a run, walk, bike ride, or triathlon to help raise awareness and funds.

### Pan-Mass Challenge

[pmc.org](http://pmc.org)

The Pan-Mass Challenge is an annual bike-a-thon that raises money for the Dana-Farber Cancer Institute in Boston. Cyclists choose from 11 routes with distances varying from 25 to 190 miles over a span of one or two days. Depending on the route, cyclists must raise between \$500 and \$4,300 to participate.

about the PMC. “It was kind of kismet. I had my testing at Dana-Farber [Cancer Institute] only three weeks earlier and then I learned about the PMC, which raises money for Dana-Farber,” she recalls. “I had been entrenched in fear, and I had nursed my mother through her death, but I thought: *Here is something I can do to make a difference.* It changed my whole emotional makeup in terms of cancer, from being a victim to being able to do something. That’s what these ‘athons’ do—they make us active participants toward a cure.”

So, Ellen started pedaling and pedaling and pedaling. Then, in 2003, she was diagnosed with breast cancer after undergoing a magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) breast scan, a procedure that, in another interesting twist of fate, had just been implemented as a new screening protocol for high-risk women. “There is a cause and effect. All of this money that goes to research does pay off,” Ellen explains. “Everyone who has ever donated to my rides has helped save my life.”

Thanks to research and innovative technology, cancer was caught early in Ellen’s case—before it had a chance to spread. She underwent bilateral mastectomies and re-



Billy Starr

“Commitment elevates everything—just like most of those things in life where you stretch yourself.” —Billy Starr

construction and continued riding. Since her first PMC in 1996, Ellen has not missed a ride—not even the year she suffered a concussion four weeks before the event. So far she has raised \$160,000 for cancer research and treatment. She is passionate about the cause, the community, the camaraderie, and the fundraising. “I will keep riding,” she insists.

### Just Do Something

Ellen is not alone in her passion for fundraising through events like the PMC—not by a long shot. In fact, she

is joined by millions of other racers each year, who commit to some sort of athletic fundraising event for cancer. The racers—a mix of weekend warriors, dedicated athletes, and rookies—run, walk, bike, swim, snowshoe, ski, hike, and more in an effort to stamp out cancer.

But what do athletic events have to do with cancer? Wouldn't it be easier to simply write a check and skip the extra effort? Perhaps, but it would not be nearly as effective or as empowering.

Billy Starr, founder and executive director of the PMC, says, "Commitment elevates everything—just like most of those things in life where you stretch yourself."

Billy knows a thing or two about commitment. He started the PMC in 1980 after losing his mother, uncle, and cousin to cancer. That first year he organized 36 riders to ride to Provincetown. To hear him tell it, everything went wrong: they ran out of food and arrived in Provincetown to find that the ferry wasn't running. Nonetheless, they raised \$10,200 for the Dana-Farber Cancer Institute, and by the time they boarded a bus

to get home everyone was already talking about next year. Billy realized that something about the event resonated with people, and he knew that he had found his life's calling. The event has since raised \$338 million for cancer research and treatment at Dana-Farber through its Jimmy Fund.

And while the fundraising is critical (the money raised through the PMC constitutes more than 50 percent of the revenue for the Jimmy Fund), this event—and others like it—is about far more than money. Because while you could write a check directly to Dana-Farber and skip the sweat equity, that would mean missing an opportunity for community, inspiration, empowerment, and so much more. "We are doing what humans do best: coming together and building community to figure out how to vanquish this enemy called cancer," Ellen explains.

"It's an opportunity to extend yourself in a bigger way than writing a check," Billy insists. "You're making a physical, psychological, and financial commitment."

## The "A-Thon" Phenomenon

In 1980 the idea of athletic fundraising was a novel concept, and the PMC may have been among the first, but now countless other events have cropped up all over the world to raise funds to fight cancer. There are big events, small events, national events, and local events. There are races for men, women, and children. There are races designed to raise awareness and races designed to raise money.

And here's the thing: they're all different and they all contribute and are valuable in unique ways. Some events have more brand recognition—Relay for Life, Race for the Cure, Team in Training, and Team LiveSTRONG, for example. Others are local, homegrown events that raise money on a smaller scale.

In fact, there are now so many fundraising events that the Run Walk Ride Fundraising (RWRF) Council was launched in May 2007 to support the professionals who manage them. The RWRF Council provides conferences, workshops, online services, and more to support

## Volunteer for a Cure *You don't have to race to make a difference.*

If you're not ready to race but want to be a part of a fundraising event, consider volunteering. Volunteers are critical to the execution of any big event. The Pan-Mass Challenge (PMC) has 5,000 riders and 11 routes and requires 3,300 volunteers to pull off the event. Billy Starr, the founder and executive director of the PMC, says, "You could be cutting up oranges or riding and raising \$1,000, but either way you're part of the \$35 million gift."

The PMC riders are always grateful for the tireless support of the volunteers. "There is sort of this love-bombing thing that goes on between the volunteers and the riders," Billy explains. "Each population thinks that the other one is greater than sliced bread."

Indeed both populations are equally wonderful—all working together toward a common cause. Volunteers truly are the lifeblood of any nonprofit organization; without them large events would be impossible to orchestrate.

If you'd like to participate in the spirit of an event without lacing up your running shoes, sign up to volunteer. Your skills, commitment, and positive attitude will only add to the success of an event.

event managers and accelerate their progress. It publishes an annual report called the *Run Walk Ride Thirty* that ranks the largest fundraising events by revenue raised. In 2010 those top 30 events generated \$1.65 billion in gross revenue for charity. Yes—that’s *billion* with a *b*, and that’s only 30 events. In other words, the “a-thon” phenomenon packs a real punch.

## The Money Trail

It’s only natural to wonder where all that money goes. After all, many of these events are costly and complicated endeavors. Some people even express doubt about whether the money really helps fight cancer or simply goes toward the overhead involved with holding the race. There are many different answers to this question, which ultimately could be summarized like this: yes, the money really does help fight cancer, but “fighting cancer” can be defined in a number of ways.

Most fundraising events tend to fall into one of three categories: they raise awareness, they raise money for cancer research, or they raise money for specific programs that support cancer patients. All of this is critical to fighting cancer.

Some events simply require an entry fee, and these are more likely to be geared toward raising awareness. Others, however, require participants to meet fundraising goals. For example, depending on which route they’ve chosen, riders in the PMC are required to raise between \$500 and \$4,300. The PMC donates 100 percent of every rider-raised dollar directly to the Dana-Farber Cancer Institute.

The Leukemia & Lymphoma Society’s Team in Training (TNT) program is one of the world’s largest and most successful endurance sports charity training programs. In exchange for raising funds, participants receive four to five months of training by TNT-certified professional coaches. According to Andrea Greif, director of public relations for the Leukemia & Lymphoma Society, no more than 25 percent of what participants raise goes toward their costs, which include training and travel costs. The remainder of the money goes to the Leukemia & Lymphoma Society and is directed toward research for blood cancers as well as patient services programs.

Team LiveSTRONG hosts a number of fundraising events across the country. According to Katherine McLane, senior director for communications and external affairs, 81 percent of all funds raised is channeled

directly into programs and services that benefit cancer survivors, including patient navigation services available by phone or in person to anyone diagnosed with cancer. These free, confidential services help patients cope with the financial, emotional, and fertility impact of cancer and are available in English and Spanish to anyone in the United States.

## Research versus Support

Critics of these large fundraising events abound, but this may be the result of a lack of understanding more than anything else. Critics who say that not enough money goes to research may not fully understand the dire need for support and services. Events that raise money for cancer research do much to affect the future of cancer, while events that raise money for programs and services have a large impact on the here and now for many cancer survivors.

The bottom line is that it doesn’t have to be an either/or proposition. People fighting cancer today can benefit from the camaraderie and the uplifting spirit of the events as well as a variety of support services that are often funded by the proceeds. People who face cancer in the future will benefit from the ongoing research that develops and evaluates new and innovative treatment strategies, which is often funded by events like these.

In other words, there is value in each of the event models that contribute in some way, whether it’s to services that support patient well-being or to cancer research.

## More than Money

The money raised through these events is a huge boon to the fight against cancer, but ask most participants why they toe the starting line, and they’ll mention a personal connection to cancer, the pull of the challenge, the camaraderie, the sense of community, the inspiration, the empowerment—just about anything except the money. Racers—fueled by passion, commitment, and purpose—are raising both money and spirits.

Renee Hackenmiller-Paradis, the environmental health program director for the Oregon Environmental Council in Portland, always has a personal motivation when she chooses a fundraising event. An avid runner, Renee has participated in the Valentine Fanconi Anemia Run in Portland for several years. She likes to support this particular race because she has friends who perform re-



Renee Hackenmiller-Paradis

search on the disease as well as friends whose children have been affected by it. Oregon Health and Science University, located in Portland, has a strong presence in the race. “It’s a small, local race specifically designed to fund research [for Fanconi Anemia],” she explains. “I like it because I can very tangibly see where my support is going. They even have on-site bone marrow testing to see if you could be a donor.”

Having experienced an event like this from the inside, as a participant, Renee has also seen the impact on the general public of those who choose to raise funds and awareness for cancer-related charities. When she ran a marathon in San Francisco, she noticed the Team in Training participants who were wearing T-shirts inscribed with the names of loved ones. “It was really moving for me to see people out there in honor of someone in their lives,” she recalls. “It really puts things in perspective when you see people who are doing something for someone beyond themselves.”

## Just Commit

Though making the decision to participate in a fundraising event of this type may initially be intimidating, Billy Starr’s advice to anyone contemplating participating in the PMC or another event is simple: “Just commit. You’ll figure it out.” Once you’ve made the leap, you may find yourself among the many who return to these events year after year, drawn repeatedly by the opportunity to make a difference and to feel the powerful spirit of communal and individual accomplishment. 🌸

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—Renee Hackenmiller-Paradis

## Dollars for a Cure

*Fundraising events by the numbers*

### Susan G. Komen Race for the Cure

**Founded:** 1983

**Total money raised:** \$1.9 billion

**Supports:** Breast health education, screening, treatment, and research

**Breakdown:** Up to 75 percent of funds stay in the local host community to fund breast health education and breast cancer screening and treatment projects; a minimum of 25 percent of funds supports breast cancer research, meritorious awards, and educational and scientific conferences around the world.

### Leukemia & Lymphoma Society’s Team in Training

**Founded:** 1988

**Total money raised:** \$1.2 billion

**Supports:** Patient services and research for blood cancers

**Breakdown:** At least 75 percent of funds raised are used for patient services and research.

### Team LiveSTRONG

**Founded:** 1997

**Total money raised:** \$325 million

**Supports:** Programs and services for survivors

**Breakdown:** Eighty-one percent of funds raised are channeled into programs and services for cancer survivors.

### Pan-Mass Challenge

**Founded:** 1980

**Total money raised:** \$338 million

**Supports:** Cancer research and treatment at the Dana-Farber Cancer Institute through its Jimmy Fund

**Breakdown:** One hundred percent of rider-raised dollars are donated to the Dana-Farber Cancer Institute.