

# Race for Recovery honours last-living founder

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Saskatoon Express

The 18th annual Race for Recovery is honouring the Hope Cancer Centre's last-living founder, and she's a spitfire all the way.

"About two years ago, Lilah had a recurrence of cancer and she went in for surgery," said race coordinator Donna Boyce of founder Lilah Brehon. "She was in her 80s then and the doctor said, 'Given your age, I don't think we should go ahead with surgery,' and she replied, 'Damn tootin', go ahead with surgery!' About eight months

later she went on a cruise around Panama. There's no holding her down: she's a remarkable lady."

Brehon, Marie Thiesson and Olga Stefaniuk founded the HOPE Cancer Centre almost 25 years ago, after the three had attended a retreat in B.C. for cancer patients. The organization focuses on helping cancer patients during their diagnosis and treatment; specifically, the centre assists applicants with finances through a client-assistance program, which allocates up to \$1,000 per patient per year.

"I always hated when people

who, as soon as they heard somebody had cancer, decided they were going to die the next day," Brehon said. "So I wanted to make this group all that time ago. You have to think positively, because if you do, it will help your immune system. That's why HOPE does laughter clinics, meditation, stuff like that. A person does have to exercise and watch their diet and rest of course. It may not cure, but it will make your life more pleasant and has extended lives I'm sure.

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Lilah Brehon has had cancer twice  
(Photo by Joelle Tomlinson)

## Fundraising target \$70,000 this year

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"We had to have \$10,000 to get the retreats going when we started HOPE here in Saskatoon. I thought we couldn't possibly do it, but Marie and Olga were determined. We went about collecting money and visiting people. After we got the first \$1,000, we thought we were really wonderful," added Brehon with a laugh.

Around 400 runners are anticipated at this year's Race for Recovery, according to Boyce. The fundraising target is \$70,000. Participants are asked to fundraise \$25 or pay a registration fee before walking two or five kilometres, or running a timed five-kilometre course. One of the biggest challenges, Boyce says, is the competition with other events in the city.

"Unfortunately, there are so many runs that everything is pretty much status quo. We're hoping to raise visibility, so we have more people come out to the run, but for the last five years it's been pretty static," said Boyce. "We have about the same number of people come out and they're raising about the same number of dollars, but the competition is incredible. The police run is the day before, and on the same day as ours is the MS Walk."

The HOPE Cancer Centre receives no government funding, allowing the majority of the money raised to go directly to cancer patients.

"We pretty much start where the clinic ends," said Brehon, who overcame breast cancer 40 years ago, and then bowel cancer in 2011. "Maybe bus tickets so someone who can't afford them can visit their mother for the last time. Filling a deep freeze, cutting grass and doing lawn work and other things to make their life better, and happier."

The HOPE Race for Recovery is the centre's largest fundraiser. Though it is small, both Brehon and Boyce encourage residents of Saskatoon to come and enjoy the event, which is host to musical entertainment, face painting and a barbecue. The race is held at River Landing on April 28, and will run from 9 a.m. to noon with Sheila Cole from CBC serving as honorary chair. Participants are able to register and donate online at [www.hopercancercentre.com](http://www.hopercancercentre.com) or stop by the HOPE office, located at 129D Pinehouse Dr. There is also walk-up registration on the day of the race.

"I remember the first few years we didn't make any money, but it was still worth it," said Brehon, who is turning 90 on May 6. "It's fun. I come out and try to walk as much as I can. I think that people should be out and support this run: supporting the Cancer Clinic is all very well, but that money goes out east and you have to beg it back. Our money stays in Saskatchewan, and goes directly to cancer patients here.

"People who know I am a survivor can look at me and think, 'If you can survive, so can I.' And that's what HOPE and this race is all about."