

Eagles' Tackling Breast Cancer Campaign goes far beyond the end zone

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As excitement builds for this Sunday's big game between the Philadelphia Eagles and Dallas Cowboys, fans can look forward to more than tackles and touchdowns.

October is Breast Cancer Awareness Month, and on Sunday Lincoln Financial Center is turning pink, right down to the stadium's side solar panels, as part of the Eagles Tackling Breast Cancer campaign.

"It all began with a hat," said Julie Hirshey, Eagles community relations manager. "At the beginning, when we decided to sell pink hats with a portion of the proceeds benefiting breast cancer care and research, we thought we'd sell a few."

The idea scored big with fans, and a "few" hat sales turned into thousands, with the Eagles donating \$250,000 in 2007, that first year.

The team, proud to be at the forefront of this NFL program, has watched the initiative grow over the past six years. "We've raised more than \$1.4 million for the cause," Hirshey said, "and the program has expanded to include the entire league."

On Sunday, the Eagles' players will sport pink gear, including cleats, laces, towels, gloves and sweat bands, during the game in an effort to create

awareness. The equipment, according to Hirshey, then will be collected for the NFL Auction.

The team's campaign partner and sponsor, Thomas Jefferson University Hospital, will have volunteers selling pink hats. There also will be a pink towel giveaway. Eagles cheerleaders and Swoop, the team mascot, will be draped in pink gear, while staff, coaches and stadium employees will wear pink ribbon pins on their shirts.

But perhaps two of the most meaningful awareness initiatives are acknowledging nonprofits that support breast cancer care and research during the game, and the special on-field recognition of breast cancer survivors.

With a primary focus this month, the Tackling Breast Cancer Campaign is a yearlong Eagles initiative, working with partners at Jefferson Breast Care Center and Bringing Hope Home, to support Eagles fans, staff, and players affected by breast cancer. "We work year-round to

support a high quality of life for generations of Eagles fans and their families, across our region," said Hirshey. Proceeds from the 2013 campaign will benefit the Jefferson Breast Care Center.

While Hirshey mostly talks about Eagles fans touched by breast cancer, the reality is their own have been affected by the disease.

Safety Kurt Coleman's father had breast cancer, a reminder that although it's much less common, men also are stricken with the disease. One of the most publicized breast cancer deaths in this region was that of Janis Hill, former Philadelphia Eagles cheerleader and wife of KYW radio news anchor Vince Hill.

Cheering in the early 1980s as a Liberty Belle, Janis Hill performed at the Superdome in New Orleans when the Eagles played in Super Bowl XV in 1981.

In 2005, long after she had left the organization and was working as a human resources executive, she was diagnosed with breast cancer.

She died in January 2011, less than three weeks before her 52nd birthday, according to her husband.

In the years after her initial diagnosis, Janis Hill became an advocate for breast cancer survivors and was the African-American voice of awareness for Komen for the Cure Philadelphia, speaking regularly around the Delaware Valley.

She was also a member of the NFL Alumni Philadelphia Chapter Cheerleaders. She and another member had overlapping breast cancer experiences. "It's what spurred us to raise money for breast cancer as a group," said Maggie Trush-Hammond of the Philadelphia chapter, who was behind the Komen for the Cure walking team and the 2010 fundraising video "Team Ra-Ras Kicks Breast Cancer."

Combined, the video and walking team have raised well over \$100,000 for charity. "Breast cancer is something that has impacted so many of our alumni so personally," she said. "And Janis was so instrumental in getting the message out to the African-American population. She was very big on self-breast exam (and) mammogram, educating women. That's her legacy to all of us."

According to the American Cancer Society, breast cancer is the most common cancer diagnosed

in women, and the second leading cause of cancer death in women, with lung cancer ranked first. In 2013, there will be 232,000 new cases nationwide, and more than 39,000 women will die from the disease.

According to the ACS, with early detection and screening, breast cancer is highly curable. There are more than 2.8 million survivors in the United States alone, and the number grows with the advancements made in medical diagnosis and treatments — advancements made possible with vital grants from fundraising programs like the Eagles Tackling Breast Cancer.

The Eagles' pink hat will continue to serve as the symbol of the TBC campaign. "It's an important emblem for our fans," said Hirshey.

The Eagles also are turning to their social media platforms to expand fan engagement in this year's breast cancer awareness campaign. When fans use the hashtag #EaglesTBC on photos and posts to Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and Google+, everything is aggregated onto PhiladelphiaEagles.com/TBC. The page will serve as a hub where fans can engage, post pictures, and share comments about their journey to tackling breast cancer, and it will stay up during the entire month.

