

COPD Awareness:
What Just One Person Can Do, What She Did and How She Did It!
as told by Lori Palermo

One person can make a difference in COPD awareness, and here is how Lori Palermo made it happen in her own hometown. Perhaps this will inspire you or someone you know to work with COPD events and activities in your own community.

“When my dad was diagnosed with emphysema my family knew nothing about it. Then when they told us it was COPD we had no clue what that even meant. We did not know anything about the disease, how to help a loved one deal with it, or to cope with it ourselves. Seeing Dad suffer with COPD – and feel so totally alone – was horrible. After he passed away I vowed that I was going to learn everything I could about this disease and to spread the word so other families like mine would not have to go through what we did.

I had been looking through a 2004 Health Calendar and noticed so many diseases had "Awareness Months," but I did not see any for COPD or Lung Disease. That is when I got the idea to create my lung disease awareness magnet.

I did a lot of research on the internet and found the Global Initiative for Chronic Obstructive Lung Disease (GOLD) site and learned about COPD Awareness Month and World COPD Day. I decided that even if I had to do it myself, I was going to do something. I could do my own COPD information fair – put up a table with materials where people could come and learn about COPD. I have to admit, this was very hard for me because I was never one to speak or get out into the public. But I was determined to try to make a tiny difference.

I asked the American Lung Association (ALA) for help. They seemed a little hesitant about it at first because I'm just a volunteer, but then they did give me a lot of information and let me use them as a sponsor. The ALA provided information on all lung diseases, and material on quitting smoking, free of charge. Jane Martin from Breathing Better, Living Well (BBLW), helped me tremendously, giving me ideas and sending me posters, educational materials, and books to display on my table.

Prior to November I contacted two big malls in my area and one grocery store, explaining about COPD, what the disease is and about awareness month. They were all very willing to let me set up a table. I arranged the dates and times, one for each weekend (skipping one weekend) of the month. I then put together pamphlets and other information from the ALA and BBLW. I got on the GOLD website and printed out their main page with their logo, which they said is very important.

I wrote two separate articles about COPD and sent them to TV, radio stations and newspapers in the area. I was very disappointed by the lack of response from the media. But I still had my COPD fairs to look forward to.

Then I worked on awareness giveaways to attract people to the table and give them something to take home. I purchased the materials myself and I would say I spent about \$50.00-\$75.00. I still have a lot left over for my events next year, which will be even better!

I was very nervous going into all of this by myself, although my mom did come to one with me and she was amazed and very happy talking to so many people. Once I set up the table and people started coming over and asking questions, I was so calm. It was like... this is ME... This is now my mission in life.

At the malls and the store, people would come by the table asking what it was all about. I would explain that November was COPD Awareness Month. Not many of them knew what COPD was. So I gave them pamphlets on emphysema, chronic bronchitis and COPD and I explained it. I also had copies of the stories I wrote about my dad and flyers and bookmarks from Jane's site. I encouraged everyone to help themselves to the giveaways and then spread the word. A lot of people asked for info on smoking cessation. I did not have much material on this, so that will be something I will have more

of next year. People also asked about Asthma, and I had materials for them about that disease. People asked me what signs and symptoms there were for COPD and I explained all I knew from going through it with my dad. I stressed how important it is to learn how to care for a person with this disease; and to research and learn all you possibly can.

I learned a lot about myself and about people from having my COPD Fairs. I learned not to push people; they come to your table when they are ready, and then I would talk to them. It was interesting to hear so many different stories of disease, not only COPD, but cancer, diabetes, and heart disease. I met two people who lost their voice box to throat cancer. They were the nicest, friendliest people I have ever met, and they were out there like everyone else. They did not feel sorry for themselves. Those people were a real inspiration to me. Others were trying so hard to quit smoking, so I spoke to them about my freedom from smoking training and gave them a few websites to visit to get some ideas. I did meet people with emphysema and they were interested in the material. They mentioned that their doctors really do not tell them much about how the disease progresses. I explained what I knew and then gave them the information I had on my table. I had a good response at each mall and at the grocery store, about 50-75 people stopping by at each. Not everyone took things, but they at least inquired what it was all about.

All in all this was a very rewarding experience for me. Even though the media had nothing to do with it, I DID IT with the help of Jane Martin and the ALA. I feel like I did make a difference in even a small number of people in my area. Hopefully they will spread the word about COPD and we may get even more people out next year.

I also learned what else I will need next year: more info on smoking cessation, on asthma, lists of different web sites, more copies of my stories and the Breathe Better, Live in Wellness flyers – they went like crazy! I will also need a different way to set up my table so the pamphlets are more visible. I have to say, people loved the giveaways, that is a way to get them to the table and also to give you a donation!

I am proud of what I did. I feel a real satisfaction inside of me. Again, my dad was with me. He was such an outgoing person, willing to talk to everyone. I hope... no, I KNOW he is watching and helping me. I could never have gotten so far without my dad's strength inside of me – and my mission to help people and their families with COPD goes on.”

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[www.lungusa.org](http://www.lungusa.org) <<http://www.lungusa.org>>  
[www.breathingbetterlivingwell.com](http://www.breathingbetterlivingwell.com) <<http://www.breathingbetterlivingwell.com>> (includes the story of Lori's dad and how to order the lung disease awareness magnet)  
[www.goldcopd.org](http://www.goldcopd.org) <<http://www.goldcopd.org>>  
[www.uscopd.org](http://www.uscopd.org) <<http://www.uscopd.org>>  
[www.pulmonologychannel.com](http://www.pulmonologychannel.com) <<http://www.pulmonologychannel.com>>

Giveaways: Pencils: "Breathless, Not Helpless" 2005 / Pinwheels: November is COPD Awareness Month / Lifesavers: November is COPD Awareness Month - "Healthy Lungs are Life Savers" Gold Ribbons as magnets and pins

“I ordered the pencils and the pinwheels and made tags to tie on the pinwheels. The color gold was my theme. I thought of the Buttered Rum Lifesavers® and made up the saying, “Healthy Lungs are Life Savers.” I think gold ribbons should be available every year for people to make and pass around, or sell if they would like. I think giving them for free is better, but it depends on what you want to do. Breast cancer has pink ribbons... COPD should have gold ribbons.

As far as fundraising went, money from "BREATH EASIER" bracelets went to the ALA. Profits from my Lung Disease Awareness Magnets went to the Breathing Better, Living Well Pulmonary Rehab Scholarship Fund. Other donations were split between my two sponsors, the ALA and BBLW.”

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Hi, I am Lori Palermo. Let me tell you about a serious Lung Disease called Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD).



This is my table set up to inform the public that November is National COPD Month. This year's slogan is: "Breathless, not Helpless."



This is my mom Lee Litzenberger. She is helping me spread Awareness of COPD by sharing information with Ms. Rose Marie Brugger. Ms Brugger is a cancer survivor after having smoked cigarettes for 10 years.



These are my Awareness Giveaways. Pinwheels are cheerful and bright, symbolizing "Breathing is Life". You can make your own GOLD ribbons, pins or magnets to spread the word about "COPD Awareness". Remember – "Healthy Lungs are Life Savers"!