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October 30, 2008

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Stand Up To Cancer - Interview With Laura Ziskin

Posted July 23, 2008 | 08:34 AM (EST)

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On the evening of September 5, 2008, all three major networks will be broadcasting the same content.

The rare simulcast will be a telethon for [Stand Up To Cancer](#), a new face in the world of cancer awareness and charity.

I conducted an e-mail interview with Laura Ziskin, movie producer (*Spiderman*, *As Good As It Gets*, *Pretty Woman*) and Executive Producer of the SU2C telethon.

What is Stand Up To Cancer?

SU2C is a nationally televised fundraiser designed to create a "tipping point" in this country regarding cancer, cancer research and cancer therapies. It is an historic collaboration between 3 natural competitors--the big three networks abc, cbs and nbc; and its theme is collaboration. The scientific community must share rather than hoard and collaborate rather than compete. The same is true of advocacy groups and other cancer organizations who have historically been competing for relatively limited resources (cancer research funds). But the "cancer problem"--over half a million deaths a year in this country; 1500 Americans dead from cancer everyday--one per minute--can only be solved when the huge constituency of those of us touched by cancer (which is just about every person in this country) join together; stand up and demand that we do better.

There are certainly lessons to be learned from the aids activists of a couple of decades ago. Those affected by aids were much smaller in numbers, but they were vocal and united and changed the way their disease was treated in this country. SU2C's goal is to do much the same for cancer. The funds raised will be administered by the American Association for Cancer Research. 70% of the money will go towards funding dream teams, across institutions and across disciplines, focused on specific translational targets designed to get new therapies to patients as quickly as possible. 20% of the funds will be for innovative out of the box research and 10% for contingencies. We have a number of corporate donors, including Major League Baseball; but 100% of the public funds raised on television, via the website and through text donating will go to research.

Stand Up To Cancer is a rather new organization, how was it created?

As a person dealing with cancer myself, I was frustrated by the lack of new and more effective treatments and the unacceptable mortality rates from cancer in this country. After producing the Academy Awards 2 years ago, which was the year of An Inconvenient Truth, I thought about doing a documentary that could potentially tip the conversation about cancer like the way that film did about global warming. At the same time Sherry Lansing, Lisa Paulsen, Katie Couric, and Ellen Ziffren were working on the networks to give them a 'road-block' hour of television to raise money for cancer research.

In addition, Noreen Fraser a breast cancer survivor who was a patient of my doctor, and is also a television producer, had put together a cable telethon to raise money for women's cancers. It seemed like we all had the same idea at the same time. So we decided to join forces in one effort and that became Stand Up To Cancer. So we began as disparate parties joining together. And then the networks, who are natural competitors put aside their competition in an unprecedented way for the greater good. These models of collaboration became a touchstone for everything Stand Up To Cancer is doing, including what we are asking the scientists to do in terms of the science.

Who are the primary players?

Stand Up To Cancer's Executive Leadership Committee is Sherry Lansing (former CEO of Paramount Pictures), anchorwoman Katie Couric, Lisa Paulsen from

the Entertainment Industry Foundation, Kathleen Lobb from EIF, Ellen Ziffren, me, Noreen Fraser from the Noreen Fraser Foundation, Rusty Robertson from NFF, and Sue Schwartz from NFF.

What can we expect from the September 5th telethon?

I only half-jokingly say my job is to make cancer entertaining. I'm going to quote Quincy Jones and say I hope this will be "edutainment." That we will not only entertain but move, inspire and motivate people to give lots of money and get involved in changing the face of cancer in this country.

Stand Up To Cancer seems to have successfully merged old and new media. Do you see new media being a positive force in the charity world in the future?

Our website www.Standup2cancer.org is as much a part of our campaign as the show and will continue beyond Sept. 5th. Basically, the aesthetics of the site t-up the show and preview what we are doing. We are definitely taking advantage of new media (blogs and the internet) with three main goals. We are advancing the fundraising by encouraging micro-donations so that every person across the country can participate. We have modeled ourselves somewhat after the political campaigns of the season who have successfully raised money online with a micro-donation, net-roots approach.

The site will also drive buzz leading up to the September 5th televised event using this approach. Finally, we are using the site to expand the user's knowledge of all aspects of the cancer experience. Through our social networking applications The Stand on Facebook and The Constellation on our site we are connecting users and visually demonstrating that we are all affected by cancer. Through our viral videos and PSA's we are also bringing humor to the way we address this disease and creating a call to action.

The internet as a resource is something I know from experience to be something that all cancer patients turn to when they are looking for answers. We are also taking part of the nascent movement toward texting to donate which I think will be the future for micro-donations in philanthropy.

Where will Stand Up To Cancer go after the telethon?

September 5th is just the beginning. The funding and the initial projects extend over three years. The website will continue to be a reporting ground for the science and additional fundraising efforts will be announced after the show Online.

Is there anything you'd like to add?

I hope everyone watches the show on September 5th at 8pm on CBS, NBC and ABC. I hope everyone is generous with their donations. The most important thing I can say is almost every person in this country is affected by cancer in some way. If a terrorist attacked this country and killed 1500 people on any one day let alone every day, as cancer does, there would be no expense too great and no effort to great to defeat that terrorist. That's what cancer is. And we must all stand up against it.

For more info, please visit www.standup2cancer.org

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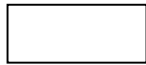
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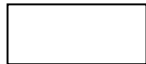
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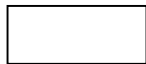
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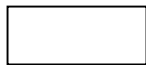
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