

Kevin Sharp coming here for benefit

By Gregory A. Summers - Features Editor

Country music artist Kevin Sharp is coming to Lancaster for a Relay For Life fund-raiser concert to benefit the American Cancer Society.

Sponsored by Douglas Presbyterian Church's Relay For Life team, the concert is 7 p.m. April 21 at Lancaster High School auditorium. Tickets are \$20 and can be purchased by calling 285-8880.

"It's divine intervention; I don't know how else to explain him coming here," said Marilyn Roddey, a member of the Douglas team.

There's more to Sharp than platinum albums and chart-topping hits like "She's Sure Taking It Well," "If You Love Somebody," and the highly acclaimed "Nobody Knows."

In January, Roddey attended a Sharp concert in Charlotte. While there, she said a woman sitting beside her shared Sharp's story, including his battle with cancer.

Sharp's bald head isn't by choice; it's the side effect of the intense chemotherapy, experimental cancer drugs and radiation treatment he underwent in the 1990s for bone cancer.

Just before starting his sophomore year of high school, Sharp started experiencing intense pain and fatigue while participating in sports. By his senior year, Sharp was diagnosed with Ewings sarcoma and told his chances of survival were slim.

He was introduced to the Make-A-Wish Foundation, which grants wishes to children with life-threatening illnesses and honored Sharp's wish to meet record producer performer David Foster.

The two became fast friends, with Foster supporting Sharp through two years of treatment.

Sharp was declared cancer-free in 1993, but never forgot how the Make A Wish Foundation impacted his life. He even sports a wishbone tattoo on his chest, which is the Make-A-Wish Foundation's symbol.

He is now that group's national spokesman and has been honored as its "Wishgranter of the Year" award. He is the only wish child in the history of the foundation to come full circle and become the wish request of other kids. He also received an "It's Always Something" award from the Gilda Radner Foundation in 1999.

Sharp released his first book, "Tragedy's Gift," in 2004 and a Hollywood studio is working on a made-for-television movie about his life.

"It just blew my mind to hear his story," Roddey said. "I didn't have any idea."

Roddey was so impressed that she contacted Sharp's agent through his Web site to see if he would consider coming here.

"It was pretty amazing," she said. "I heard back from somebody in about five minutes. They called me

and said they'd love to come here. I was really surprised that it happened that quick."

Douglas Presbyterian Church's Relay For Life team has grown to "Top Gun" status in just three years. The church's team spun off from an evangelism committee.

"We're such a small church and we've lost a lot of our church members to cancer," team member Lori Short said. "There's not many families at Douglas that haven't been impacted by cancer, and that's why so many have gotten on board to help with the relay."

In 2004, the 24-member team raised \$2,000, but by last year, that amount had grown to more than \$17,000. Most of the funds came from church dinners and donations.

"We've done OK, but we've never tried anything like this," Short said. "We hope we haven't bitten off more than we can chew."

Roddey doesn't think that's the case.

"The way this thing came together, it was just meant to be," she said.

Want to go

- WHAT: Country music star Kevin Sharp in concert
- WHEN: 7 p.m. April 21
- WHERE: Lancaster High School auditorium
- COST: \$20; proceeds benefit Relay For Life
- INFORMATION: Call 285-8880 to order tickets