

## USC Relay for Life breaks fundraising record- in just 12 hours

By Katie Cannon

Cheers erupt from participants and volunteers gathered as USC Relay for Life announces that the number \$162,455 was flipped at their annual main event this year, a night that brings the campus and community together in the fight against cancer.

“Cancer never sleeps, so neither do we,” said Director of Finance Scott Melski, reflecting on USC Relay for Life’s 12+ hour main event.



Attendees gather at the opening ceremony for USC Relay for Life Main Event on April 12, 2025. Photo by Katie Cannon

For the past eight months, Melski and his team have worked hard to raise funds for the American Cancer Society, with all efforts culminating in a final push on April 12. The cause is personal for many members of Relay, including Melski, who lost his grandfather and a close family friend to cancer during his senior year of high school.

“I gained even more reasons to fight during my freshman year of college when I lost my grandfather and my mom’s best friend, my Aunt Wendy,” Melski shared. “I relay for a lot of

reasons, and while it's unfortunate to say, that loss has been a constant source of motivation. It's what gets me out of bed each morning, to keep fighting alongside the team I've come to love."



Relay members participate in activities held throughout their 12 hour fundraising period. Photo by Katie Cannon

Participants are encouraged to set individual fundraising goals, with every dollar going directly to the American Cancer Society. Each year, the organization hosts its signature Main Event, a night that brings students and community members together for a final fundraising effort, and to honor those affected by cancer.

"The main event is the culmination of all of our hard work," Melski explained. "It's a 12-hour block party where we unite as a community to fight back against this terrible disease."

Volunteers dedicate their time, energy and services throughout the event in hopes of raising as much money as possible during the 12-hour window. Last year, USC Relay for Life raised \$145,321. Event Coordination Chair Makenna Hamilton hoped to surpass that milestone in 2024.

“I’d love for us to at least meet last year’s total,” Hamilton said ahead of the event. “I’m confident that with everything we’ve planned for the Main Event, we’ll get that final push we need.”

Heading into April 12, the team had raised \$136,035, needing just over \$9,000 to match the previous year’s total.

For senior Kayleigh Schmidt, this would be her fourth and final main event as a student.

“I really do think we can do it,” Schmidt said. “This is all of our hard work coming to an end. I believe in our team, I believe in our organization, and I believe in our mission. I lost my dad to brain cancer in 2022, so this means everything to me.”

When the final number was revealed at the end of the night, USC Relay for Life had raised an additional \$26,420, bringing their total for the year to \$162,455.





USC Relay's team ends the school year raising \$162,455 dollars, with all proceeds going to the American Cancer Society. Photo by Katie Cannon

“I’m still in awe,” said Senior Executive Director Ronan Mulkerrin. “We faced so much adversity all year, but I knew this group was capable of amazing things. The biggest Main Event fundraising total in USC history — it’s truly unbelievable. I’m so proud of this team and everything we accomplished this year.”

For many participants, this milestone held a deeper, personal meaning. Liam Bennett, one of the senior Team Development chairs, said this accomplishment had an extra special meaning.

“I relay for my Uncle Kelly, and Saturday April 13 happened to be the day of his passing, as well as main event,” Bennett said. “The emotions that came over me when we flipped the final number was an indescribable feeling of joy, that we had done this in his honor as well as many

others. This organization has helped me honor him and continue to fight relentlessly to a cure, and I will forever be indebted.”

Relay for Life has been on college campuses across the country for nearly 40 years. Though not an official campus club or affiliated with the university, Relay for Life was created by students who are united by a shared passion and deep care for the cause. It serves as a way for students to get involved and come together with one common goal in mind: Ending cancer.