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CONTACT:

Mary Ellen Smith, Vice Chair
Pancreatic Cancer Association of WNY
Cell (585) 703-2759

**11-Year Pancreatic Cancer Survivor To be Honorary Chairperson of
6th Annual Step It Up! Cure Pancreatic Cancer 5K Walk**
Pancreatic Cancer Association of WNY's annual fundraising walk set for November 21st.

ROCHESTER, N.Y.—The Pancreatic Cancer Association of Western New York has announced that **Mark Kokanovich, an 11-year pancreatic cancer survivor** and a former Wilmot Cancer Institute board member, is the **2015 Honorary Chair of its 6th Annual Step It Up! Cure Pancreatic Cancer 5K Walk**. The fundraiser held every November is an indoor 5K walk and family fun day. The 2015 event is scheduled for **Saturday, November 21st at RIT's Gordon Field House from 12:00 noon until 4:00 p.m.** Organizers state that the purpose of the event is to create awareness and generate financial support for local research at the Wilmot Cancer Institute as well as programs and services for patients and their families.



Mark Kokanovich spent 22 years in business in the metalworking machinery industry and currently devotes his time to service on numerous civic and community non-profit and not-for-profit boards and councils.

He has been a member of the Brighton CSD Board of Education since 2006, and has served as Board President since 2009. He is Past-President of the Monroe County School Boards Association. Kokanovich currently serves on the Town of Brighton Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee and the Parks, Recreation and Community Services Advisory Board. He recently completed service as an active board member of the James P. Wilmot Cancer Institute at the University of Rochester Medical Center, and devotes much of his time to cancer-related causes.

He and his wife, Jean Maess, reside in Brighton and have two adult daughters.

“The walk is our major fundraiser and a huge opportunity for us to create community awareness,” stated Mary Ellen Smith, Pancreatic Cancer Association of WNY Associate Executive Director. Smith added, “As a survivor, Mark plays a significant role as honorary chair in helping us bring more awareness to this horrific disease. To those diagnosed and their families, he also brings hope - something that we strive to create through the upbeat tone of the walk and by educating people about this disease.”

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The Pancreatic Cancer Association of Western New York is a community grassroots organization of volunteers that came together five years ago to effect change after their lives were affected by pancreatic cancer whether it was the loss of a loved one or loved one fighting the disease. The agency's annual Step It Up! Cure Pancreatic Cancer 5K Walk is an indoor event geared toward the whole family. Organizers state that the day is full of entertainment that all ages will enjoy. Held at RIT's Gordon Field house, it accommodates those who wish to walk the 5K or just enjoy the performances. One of the featured groups performing is the University of Rochester's all male A Cappella group, the YellowJackets. There are also several kids' activities including clowns, a bounce house, games, and face painting. Food is available as well. Serving as masters of ceremony for the event are Scott Spezzano, 98.9 The Buzz, and Nikki Rudd, WHEC. People are encouraged to register early and can register as an individual or a team. Walk details and registration information can be found on their website at www.pcawny.org.

Event organizers state that a portion of this year's event proceeds will directly benefit local pancreatic cancer research conducted at Wilmot Cancer Institute by Helmet "Hucky" Land, Ph.D. and Aram Hezel, M.D. PCAWNY has made an annual donation the past four years to help advance their research work. Lorie Perez, Pancreatic Cancer Association of WNY Executive Director stated, "We are a local organization. It was important to us to focus our support locally and towards early detection methods since finding this cancer, any cancer, in its early stages is critical to surviving it. We will continue to fund research, but we are also focusing on patient programs and services."

Pancreatic cancer is the fourth leading cause of cancer deaths in the U.S. and third in Monroe County. Of the top ten cancers, pancreatic cancer has only a single digit survival rate with 6% of those diagnosed surviving beyond five years. The five year survival rate has barely changed over the past 40 years, while the five year survival rate for other cancers rose from 49% to 67% or even 90% or higher. According to National Cancer Institute, new pancreatic cancers have risen 1.2% annually with death rates increasing .4% for the last 10 years. Pancreatic cancer research receives about 2% funding from the National Cancer Institute (NCI) which is the lowest funding of all major cancers. As the country's fourth leading cause of cancer deaths, pancreatic cancer ranks 11th in funding from the NCI.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Photo of Mark Kokanovich attached to email.

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About Pancreatic Cancer Association of Western NY – Pancreatic Cancer Association of WNY (PCAWNY), an all volunteer organization established in 2009, is a Rochester, NY based charity established to create awareness, raise funding, and advocate for all those affected by pancreatic cancer. Learn more at www.pcawny.org.