

CALEDONIA – Playing a rival is always special.

But there might not be anything sweeter than playing (and beating) a rival AND supporting a worthy cause at the same time.

The Caledonia and New Hope high school volleyball teams will vie for bragging rights on Thursday, Oct. 5, at Caledonia High in the seventh-annual Dig Pink match. All proceeds from the event will go directly to The Side-Out Foundation for the research and treatment of Stage 4 breast cancer.

CHS coach Samantha Brooks said the idea for the match came from defensive specialist / libero Bailie Cross, who wondered if the team could play in a Dig Pink match sponsored by the Side-Out Foundation, an American non-profit breast cancer charity in Fairfax, Virginia, that raises awareness and funds for the treatment of metastatic breast cancer. Brooks researched about the foundation and what it would take to make the match happen and quickly realized it would be a great way to give back to the community.

“We have done some really neat things,” said Brooks, whose program with the help of its community and Caledonia football, has raised \$16,800. In the last four years, New Hope volleyball has raised more than \$8,500, including more than \$3,600 in 2022. “The girls have got on board with it and added to the ideas, and it has become a really big event for us.”

New Hope coach Allison Woolbright said she and her program were “all in” as soon as Brooks contacted her about the idea. She said it is important to give back and to raise awareness and money for a great cause that has affected so many people, including her family.

“I thought it would be a way we also could promote awareness but give the girls some opportunities to be a part of something a lot bigger than

volleyball,” said Woolbright, whose mother’s mother had breast cancer as well as her great aunt. She also has had friends and co-workers affected by it. “I think the girls have to know there is so much more outside the court. Being a part of this allows us to help spread the message.”

Games will kick off at 4:30 p.m. (middle school) and include junior varsity (5:30 p.m.) and varsity (6:30) matches. Breast cancer survivors will be honored at the event.

Those who would like to support the cause can click the link -- <https://giving.side-out.org/campaigns/19696> -- for a quick, easy and safe way to help meet the fundraising goal of \$2,000.

Donations will be raffled off at the event. Raffle tickets (for \$2) also will be sold at the match.

Funds raised for The Side-Out Foundation go toward research specifically for patients with metastatic breast cancer, the most advanced form of the disease, and the least-funded area of research. Every \$2,000 raised through Dig Pink allows The Side-Out Foundation to provide an unprecedented analysis to metastatic breast cancer patients and their oncologists. This unique analysis ranks treatment solutions and clinical trials for each patient that can substantially improve the length and quality of their life.

“The community has been phenomenal, both Caledonia and New Hope as well as Columbus businesses,” Woolbright said. “Everybody sees this as a worthy cause, so there is no doubt people are more than willing to do whatever they can to contribute or donate items. ... It is not just the volleyball teams. It is the entire community and really Columbus because there have been so many businesses that have been really supportive in large ways.”

The last two years, Brooks said certified family nurse practitioner Alison Harris, the mother of CHS senior Hailey Harris, has talked to her players about women's health and the importance of getting screened for breast cancer and taking precautions to decrease the chances of getting it. She said Harris' participation is another example of the community's willingness to help support the schools, the players and a great cause.

"The best thing about it for me is even though New Hope is our rival in volleyball and other sports, it gives us a chance to work with them," Brooks said. "Not only as coaches, but it gives the girls a reason to come together and work together for something that is really important and something that is bigger than all of us, and something we will be affected by in some point in our life."

Caledonia won the first three Dig Pink matches, and New Hope has won the last three.