

CALEDONIA -- Laura Lee Holman didn't know anything about Dig Pink when she accepted a job to return to New Hope High School.

But Caledonia High volleyball coach Samantha Brooks wanted to make sure Holman was willing to keep the schools' annual match to raise money for and awareness about breast cancer going, so she reached out to her on May 8.

"The next day I went to the office and saw the trophy and thought, 'Oh, there is a trophy involved, so this is a pretty big deal', " Holman said.

Caledonia and New Hope will compete for bragging rights Tuesday night at New Hope High in the eighth-annual installment of the Dig Pink match. The middle school teams will kick off the action at 4:30 p.m., followed by the junior varsity (5:30 p.m.) and varsity (6:30 p.m.) matches.

All proceeds from the event will go directly to The Side-Out Foundation, an American, 501(c)(3)non-profit breast cancer charity in Fairfax, Virginia (SOF), for the research and treatment of Stage 4 breast cancer.

"I am very excited," said Holman, who started the volleyball program at New Hope High but didn't get a chance to be involved in the Dig Pink match in her first stint as a coach and teacher at the school. "I still don't think I can really prepare myself. All of the talk and all of the hype definitely has me eager to get involved in supporting a great cause."

Holman said she watched a film of the 2023 match and has an idea of what to expect. Regardless of the outcome, Holman said it is important for the players to understand it is more than a game and that breast cancer has impacted so many people.

Brooks said the idea for the match came from former CHS defensive specialist / libero Bailie Cross, who wondered if the team could play in a Dig Pink match. Brooks researched about The SOF and what it would take to make a match happen and quickly realized it would be a great way to give back to the community.

“I had no idea it would get as big as it is now,” Brooks said. “In the back of my mind, I probably hoped it would be something that would carry on every year. I am grateful coach Holman is willing to continue this tradition with us. To incorporate something so important into this rivalry makes it more fun and special.”

The CHS volleyball program, working with the school’s football team and the community, has raised nearly \$23,000 in the first seven years. Brooks also has invited local health care workers to talk to her players about the importance of women’s health, the importance of getting screened for breast cancer and the precautions they need to take to decrease the chances of getting it.

New Hope has raised more than \$8,500, including \$3,600 in 2022.

Megan Musca, the SOF community engagement leader for the Southeast, said the organization is thankful to have such a wonderful partnership with Caledonia and New Hope high schools. She said each year about 500 schools participate in Dig Pink matches across the country.

“The average fundraising amount per school is around \$2,500,” Musca said. “We have about 20 schools that raise over \$15,000 each year, and some raise over \$25,000. Dig Pink events raise between \$1.4-\$1.5 million each year.”

Musca said The SOF has oncologists performing its own research at its lab at George Mason University. She said the organization also has a partnership with Perthera Lab, and that the Side-Out Foundation pays for testing on patients' specific tumors to see the exact molecular makeup of that cancer, why it is behaving the way it is, what will it do next and what is the best way to stop it. Musca said the report costs \$2,000 and The SOF pays for it through the fundraising of volleyball teams across the country.

As a former standout multi-sport athlete at New Hope, Holman understands how passionately the New Hope and Caledonia communities support the schools' teams and events. She said the willingness of so many people in both communities to get behind the Dig Pink match has been essential to its success and growth.

"Sports mean something here. Athletic events mean something here," Holman said. "As a kid and as a player here, not knowing that everywhere is where you are from, I wish I would have known that. I think that is one of the things that called me home. I can remember being an athlete here and the parents supporting us and everything we did. As a coach here, especially the Class of 2014, I don't think I have had a better group of parents since then. They rallied behind me and the kids and everybody. Seeing them get behind this cause says a lot about our community as a whole, and Caledonia has that same mindset. I hope these kids don't get too old like me before they realize what they're being a part of is something really special."

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

To learn more about the SOF, go to: <https://side-out.org/>. The SOF helps people with breast cancer regain control of their lives. The organization started its fundraising efforts through volleyball. Executive

director and founder Rick Dunetz was a high school volleyball coach when his mother, Gloria, was diagnosed with stage IV breast cancer. Rick and his father, Bryant, decided to tell her story, and the story of all those with metastatic breast cancer, through dedicated volleyball matches across the United States.