



## RUNNING FREE

*Submitted by Barbara VanCortlandt and Rita Davenport*

For some of us, "Running Free" may conjure memories of a 1980 Iron Maiden song. On October 1, "Running Free" took on new meaning for two KDHE Cancer Program staff members who were asked to present Susan G. Komen for the Cure, KDHE's Early Detection Works (EDW) program and breast health information for inmates at the Topeka Women's Correctional Facility who participate in a running club.

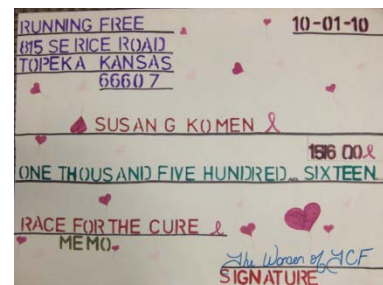
"Running Free" is a running club which began in the summer of 2007 when volunteers duplicated the community Race Against Breast Cancer 5K at the prison. When inmates embraced running and community service, "Running Free" became a permanent club. The women now race for several charities, raising and donating almost \$30,000 to date. No taxpayer money is involved; it is volunteer-led with inmates paying their own race registration fees out of their meager earnings.

Some inmates run for physical activity, some to make positive life changes and some to create a sense of accomplishment. Participation gives inmates a chance to feel a part of the community again, while learning to live a healthier lifestyle. Some seek the sense of freedom it gives them when they're out in the open. "It's like you're completely not here when you run. When you run around the track, it's total freedom," said an inmate at the prison and member of the running club.

The moderator for the October 1 educational event spoke eloquently and passionately about the running club and the benefits she derives from running, setting and accomplishing goals, and encouraging others to set and accomplish their own goals. This was her last race with "Running Free;" she was scheduled to be released October 5.

Barbara VanCortlandt spoke about Susan G. Komen for the Cure®. Before Susan Komen died of breast cancer in 1980, her sister, Nancy Brinker, promised that she would do everything possible to put an end to breast cancer. In 1982, Nancy Brinker established Susan G. Komen for the Cure®, which is now the largest breast cancer charity in the world.

While Barbara was speaking, Rita Davenport observed the inmates. A knot welled up in her throat. She could imagine her young granddaughter singing the words to a Bill Gaither song, "I am a promise; I am a possibility; I am a great big bundle of potentiality!" These inmates exemplified those qualities and for many of them the first step was joining the running club. Their shoes are "gently used" donations from the community; they run in sweats and T-shirts. Inmates earn very little, so monetary donations mean all the more. These dedicated runners proudly presented a check for \$1,516 for Susan G. Komen for the Cure®.



Rita began her presentation by asking what motivates people to run and the answer that struck her most was "freedom." Freedom to run; freedom to give back to the community. Both presenters went away filled with a sense of pride to be a small part of such love and generosity from an amazing, unexpected source. May we all find our own ways to make a difference and be "Running Free."