



Rachel Krafft stands next to the heart that her mother painted 13 years ago on a chicken coop at her family's farm near Erie. Her mother died of melanoma when Rachel was 16 years old.

Lewis Geyer/
Times-Call

IN MEMORY OF MOM

Woman builds website to fight melanoma

By Kari Keller
Longmont Times-Call

LONGMONT — Rachel Krafft understands firsthand the odds of beating melanoma and wants to help educate others about the deadly disease.

Her mother, Jeri Krafft, died after a lengthy battle against melanoma when her daughter was just 16 years old. Devastated and confused by her loss, Rachel Krafft vowed to carry on her mom's memory. As a teen, she began to reach out to her community and raise awareness about melanoma, a rare but often deadly form of skin cancer.

"My mom lived her life to the fullest. I was 16 when she died, but I've never regretted it. My mom wouldn't want me to focus on the negative," said Krafft, 23.

On May 10, one day after Mother's Day, Krafft launched a website in support of the Boulder

Melanoma Project. Her goal is to raise \$10,000 for melanoma research and the Jeri Krafft Memorial Scholarship, awarded to high school seniors involved in the 4-H program.

Krafft grew up on a 7-acre farm outside of Niwot, where she spent her childhood riding and training horses with her mom and two younger sisters. She said her fondest memories come from the time she spent on the farm with her family.

According to Krafft's aunt Donna Martin, Jeri was an incredibly loving and caring mother who dedicated her life to her three children. She was the center of the family and fought hard to beat melanoma.

"She fought with a vengeance. Her only focus was to be here for a few more years for the girls," Martin said.

On Oct. 16, 2003, Jeri Krafft died at age 44.

In May 2009, Rachel

Krafft graduated from Susquehanna University in Selinsgrove, Pa., with a bachelor's degree in biology and a minor in chemistry. She dreams of becoming a doctor and caring for people, just as her mom did years earlier as a nurse at Boulder Community Hospital.

Since graduation, Krafft has been back in Longmont studying for the Medical College Admission Test. Yet about a year ago, she felt her life was missing a sense of purpose.

"I wanted to be an inspiration. I needed a change and wanted to be involved in something bigger than myself," Krafft said. "The Boulder Melanoma Project is about remembering my mom's life and looking forward in mine. I thought \$10,000 paired nicely with 2010. The goal is to raise this amount of money in one year."

The Jeri Krafft Memorial Scholarship was set up in

2003 before Krafft's mother died. It is awarded to active members of 4-H's livestock program to help pay for college tuition.

Krafft's mom was a member of 4-H when she was a child and felt it was important to pass on this experience to her three children.

"She gave me her love for animals, horses, and for just being outside," Krafft said.

The other portion of the money Krafft intends to raise through the project will be donated to Dr. Rene Gonzalez, director of the Melanoma Research Clinics at the University of Colorado at Denver. Gonzalez treated Krafft's mom when she first got sick in 1996, then again in 2001. Both Gonzalez and his nurse, Maude Becker, played an enormous role in the Krafft

family's life.

"After Jeri's procedures, Maude was the first person we saw," Martin said.

It was important to Rachel Krafft to reach out to her mom's doctor and start a conversation about raising awareness for melanoma.

Due to Colorado's altitude and abundant sunshine, the state's melanoma rates are among the highest in the nation.

On May 25, Krafft partnered with the Chick-fil-A restaurant in Longmont to raise money for the Boulder Melanoma Project. Chick-fil-A agreed to donate 20 percent of its sales between 5:30 and 8 p.m. that day. Of the total \$878 raised, \$175 was donated to the project. An additional \$200 was donated directly to Krafft during the event.

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To learn more about the Boulder Melanoma Project, or to donate to sponsored research or scholarship, visit www.bouldermelanomaproject.org.