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## Miss USA visits Boston to promote breast cancer awareness, Komen charity race

Posted by Matt Rocheleau October 27, 2011 11:23 AM

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Alyssa Campanella visited Avila Modern Mediterranean Tuesday night. The restaurant has been donating a portion of a special dessert's proceeds to Komen MA. Above, Miss USA with Avila owner Steve DiFillippo.

By Matt Rocheleau, Town Correspondent

Four months after being crowned Miss USA, 21-year-old Alyssa Campanella visited Boston this week for the first time to advocate for breast cancer research and education, a cause that has impacted millions of families, including her own.

Campanella's grandmother was diagnosed with stage one breast cancer. One year after treatment that included surgery, radiation, and medication, her grandmother was given a clean bill of health.

"I've always supported breast cancer awareness," the New Jersey native said during an interview at New Balance's headquarters in Brighton Wednesday afternoon. "When a relative of mine got diagnosed with it, I think it really kicked into full gear that, wow, you know what, it can affect anybody."

"This disease can hit anyone and it's just hit someone in my family," she added. "And, you don't think it's going to and then when it does you're like, 'OK, what can we do to get things right, try to find a cure, try to find research for better medication, make the survival rate keep going up.'"

Miss USA 2011 flew into Boston Tuesday afternoon, one week before breast

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cancer awareness month, to promote this Sunday's 19th annual Susan G. Komen Massachusetts Race for the Cure.

(To read a Q&A with Miss USA while she was in Boston, [click here.](#))

Her life has been hectic ever since mid-June, when, immediately after winning her title at a Las Vegas resort casino, she attended an after party there and flew that night to New York City to start a week of countless media appearances. To volunteer and help promote various causes and nonprofits, she visits at least one new city in the average week, said Andrea Chafouleas who has spent nearly every waking moment alongside each year's Miss USA winner for the past four years.

"It's nonstop. It's a fun year, but a tiring year," said Chafouleas, a manager and talent developer for the organization that runs the national pageant and also runs Miss Universe, an international beauty competition held last month in Brazil where Miss USA placed in the top 16.

This week was no different for Campanella when she made her first visit to metro Boston (she's visited a suburb – but forgets which one – once before). Hosted by New Balance, a national sponsor of the Komen race, Miss USA was whisked around the city stopping frequently to pose for photos and sign autographs.

Within about a 24-hour span, she attended a dessert dinner that benefitted the state's Komen affiliate, spoke to several local radio and TV stations to promote this weekend's race in South Boston, volunteered by helping prepare boxes of labels, bib numbers and T-shirts some 6,000 race participants will wear on Sunday, toured New Balance's headquarters and, by Wednesday afternoon, was boarding a plane from Logan on her way back to the Manhattan apartment she shares with Miss Universe.

Wearing her Miss USA sash along a slew of stops around Boston Wednesday morning, the red-haired pageant winner sported a pair of personalized New Balance sneakers that are part of a shoe line, the "Lace Up for the Cure Collection," sold year-round to raise proceeds, a minimum \$500,000 donation each year, for Susan G. Komen for the Cure.

For part of the day, Campanella hurried around a large ground-floor room of a Boston University residential hall. The space was donated by the school for race volunteers to use this week in order to prepare supplies for Sunday's event, which annually is the largest fundraiser for the Massachusetts Affiliate of Susan G. Komen for the Cure.

She said in her first few months as Miss USA, especially in the past few weeks during breast cancer awareness month, she's learned a lot about the disease and what's being done to fight it.

Alongside other volunteers, she moved from one station of supplies to another as the crew helped ready boxes of shirts and other race gear that participants will begin to pick up on Thursday.

"I've learned a lot about health in the past month," she said later from a seventh-floor conference room in New Balance's headquarters. "The Miss USA title is not only being beneficial for me in what I want to do later on as far as my career goes, but it's also beneficial in that I'm taking in knowledge that I didn't think I was going to. I don't want to take any of this for granted. I'm really learning a lot from this experience."

Komen race participants' shirts come in two colors, white and pink. Around 300 are pink, reserved for breast cancer "survivors."

"We consider someone a survivor the moment they're diagnosed because they're still alive," said the state Komen affiliates executive director Ronni Cohen-Boyar.

The 56-year-old from Sharon was diagnosed with breast cancer five years ago

The 36-year-old from Sharon was diagnosed with breast cancer five years ago. After initial treatment seemed to have worked, the cancer returned about a year and a half ago. Cohen-Boyar had a bilateral mastectomy.

“Cancer doesn’t happen in a vacuum. It wasn’t just me and it’s not just the people in the pink,” she said. “It’s all the people who love them and care for them.”

It’s the 5,600 people who on Sunday will wear white shirts, which are given to participants who have never been diagnosed with breast cancer. That support, and the efforts of sponsors and celebrity spokespeople like Miss USA, are crucial to the event’s success.

“It does make a big difference,” she said, adding later that, “A fundraiser with no awareness is a failure. But a fundraiser that doesn’t raise money, but does raise awareness is still a success. This event is the perfect combination of both.”

Cohen-Boyar has participated in the race every year since she was diagnosed, except for the first year. She was too sick then. Her neighbors ran in her honor.

“It was completely unexpected. It’s not like we were strangers, but we weren’t best buddies either. It was really cool,” she recalled, as she wiped tears from her eyes. “Really emotional.”

Ever since she’s joined the crowd of walkers and runners she has found, “It’s one of the most emotional days of the year for me. I stand in front of all of these people lined up and ready to go to help someone else they know and love.”

“I can’t wait until this race is strictly a celebration,” she continued. “Until it’s just celebrating the end of this disease. Celebrating the cure.”

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