By Jan Schultz
The Imperial Republican

Heavy, wet snow didn’t deter participants in Saturday’s seventh annual All Cancer Walk in Imperial.

Despite waking up to snow that morning, 183 individuals still walked in the annual event. Organizers had hoped for 100 participants.

Francisca Morales, committee member of the Chase County Community Hospital-sponsored event, said they’ve never had to deal with snow for the walk held early in October each year.

With the weather change, walkers were given the option of completing their 5K either in the city gym or outside. Many, bundled up with winter coats and gloves, still chose to walk outdoors.

Organizers received a total of 219 registrations for the walk, many signing up that morning even though it was $5 more and with snow outside.

Morales said it was a big success.

Again, she said area businesses were very generous in their donations for the silent auction. That event alone raised $4,256.

Another $3,285 was collected from registrations and $279 from individual donations.

She noted donations are still coming in and all of the expenses haven’t been figured in to determine the bottom line profit from the walk. She hopes to have that next week.

Money raised from the event stays in Chase County to assist local patients who are fighting cancer, expenses for treatment and for preventative care costs such as mammograms and PSA tests for men.

Speaking of men, Morales said this year’s event drew the most males than any of the six previous walks.

“I’m not sure if that was due to spouses’ or girlfriends’ encouragement” or other reasons, but Morales was glad to see more men take part.

About 125 were served lunch after the walk that included a turkey roll-up, fruit cup, vegetables, chips/fiesta dip and cancer ribbon cookies with green frosting.

Morales noted the green color on cancer ribbons signifies gallbladder cancer, which was the topic of Saturday’s speaker, Jen Harris of Imperial, whose mother, Janice Allen, died of that disease.

Doug Allen, Jen’s dad, gained the highest number of pledges for his walk, while Cindy Roesener was second.

Team Rosa, organized by Cynthia Almanza, was the biggest group of walkers registered that day with 14.

Gallbladder cancer rare

Jen Harris told the standing-room-only audience in the St. Patrick Church Hall that gallbladder cancer is very rare.

In fact, cancer in the pear-shaped organ under the liver on the right side of the abdomen averages about three cases in 100,000 per year. Cases are more common in residents of South America, Japan and Israel.

But, it does occur more often in women than men, Harris noted.

Being obese increases a person’s risk for the cancer, and “yo-yo diets” seem to be a factor in many of those diagnosed, Harris said. She remembers her mother dabbling in various diets a lot.

Unfortunately, sometimes cancer of the gallbladder does not produce symptoms until late in the disease. Most common is pain in the upper right portion of the abdomen, underneath the right rib cage. Patients with gallbladder cancer may also report symptoms such as abdominal bloating, nausea, vomiting, weakness, jaundice, skin itching, fever, chills, poor appetite and weight loss.

Harris said her mother had been experiencing some of the symptoms, “but other things were going on in the family,” on which she was spending time.

When she finally went to the doctor in January 2008, ovarian cancer was first suspected, Harris said.

But, the tests instead showed her gallbladder “was very sick,” she said, with tumors covering the entire surface of her mother’s abdomen, as well as in other organs.

Her gallbladder was removed, she had a hysterectomy and chemotherapy followed, the latter shrinking the tumors.

Some additional surgery was performed in June that year, but she died the next month after spending time in a North Platte hospice. There, she was able to celebrate granddaughter Sophie’s first birthday.

Despite losing her mother, Harris encouraged the attendees to “choose hope” because with so many cancers today, if found early by seeing their doctor and with treatment, people can survive.

Her message was followed with a prayer before people left the hall for the 5K walk.

Morales said Wauneta will be the site for the eighth annual All Cancer Walk in 2013. The October event each year alternates between the two communities.