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## Promoting sun safety event Saturday in Norwell

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Hingham educator Susan Keyes knows all too well the pain and misery that melanoma can mean for a family. From 1995-1997, she underwent a grueling treatment regimen for metastatic melanoma. Against the odds, she survived — although she can never be in the sun again — and became committed to helping others understand prevention of the disease so that they can protect themselves and their loved ones.

As the head of the foreign language department for the Hingham Public Schools and a French teacher at the High School, Keyes has taken an active role in bringing an awareness of the dangers of tanning to students. She presented a gripping account of her struggle with melanoma to the entire high school at an assembly that was held during in the spring of 2013. Known to her students as “Madame,” Keyes presented in a very matter-of-fact and even tone the agonizing effects of her treatment.

“It was so quiet in that auditorium that you could hear a pin drop,” she says. “The students were focused on what I was saying, and they really seemed to get the idea that this could happen to anyone.”

That presentation made an impact on Lea Concannon, who is now a senior co-captain of the HHS girls golf team. “Her whole statement really stuck with me, especially the timing of it during prom season when there is so much pressure to look your best and for some people that means tanning,” she says.

The golf team will be volunteering on March 19 at Putt for Prevention — a fundraiser for the Children’s Melanoma Prevention Foundation from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. on Saturday, March 19, at South Shore Skin Center in Norwell. All ages are invited to play an indoor 18-hole mini-golf course for \$5 per player or \$20 per family. The event is being sponsored by a number of South Shore businesses including Hingham Institution for Savings and Robin’s Nest.

“We are particularly excited about this event because it was created with kids in mind,” says Maryellen Maguire-Eisen, executive director and founder of the Children’s Melanoma Prevention Foundation. “Our organization is focused on kids, and we want as many kids as possible to come and have fun.”

Keyes became familiar with CMPF a few years ago, when Maguire-Eisen’s daughter Laura ended up being one of her French students at the high school. Keyes describes a “serendipitous moment” when she learned about the foundation through one of Laura’s assignments, which was written in French.

“After reading her essay, I spoke with Laura about the work her mother was doing and then introductions were made,” says Keyes, who became a CMPF board member in 2011. “I am uncomfortable talking about that part of my life, but if I can help one person, then it’s worth it,” she says.

More than 5 million people are diagnosed with melanoma each year, and one person dies every 45 minutes from the disease in the United States. What makes melanoma particularly frustrating for medical professionals is that it is largely preventable and also very treatable when caught early. But in the later stages of the illness, cure rates are very low and the treatments are exceedingly difficult for patients and their families, Maguire-Eisen says.

In February, the state of Massachusetts passed a law banning anyone under the age of 18 from using or operating a tanning bed. Cancer activists, including the American Cancer Society and the CMPF, had been pushing for passage of this law for more than a decade because numerous studies had demonstrated a clear link between tanning and melanoma.

“Melanoma is now developing in very young women because the newer tanning machines are even stronger and more carcinogenic than they used to be,” says Maguire-Eisen, who testified at the hearings for this bill. “I am very pleased that children in Massachusetts will now be protected from this carcinogen at least until they are 18 years old.”

The Hingham-based CMPF is a non-profit, educational foundation established in 2003 that teaches children and their caregivers how to protect themselves from the harmful rays of the sun while enjoying outdoor activities. Each year, more than 50,000 students from kindergarten through 12th grade actively participate in presentations and projects provided by trained Foundation staff members at local schools, sailing clubs, day care centers and health clubs. All programming is provided free of charge to participants and is made possible by sponsorships and fundraising by the organization. More information is available at [www.melanomaprevention.org](http://www.melanomaprevention.org).



Susan Keyes is the department chair of foreign languages and is a melanoma survivor who is committed to helping others understand prevention of the disease so that they can protect themselves and their loved ones. Wicked Local Staff Photo/ Robin Chan