Senior center Michalina Tomczak and senior guard Kasey Gassensmith shaved their heads to raise awareness about colon cancer April 10. Gassensmith donated her locks to Pantene Beautiful Lengths, and Tomczak donated more than $1,500 for Chris4Life Colon Cancer Foundation.

Colon cancer, also called colorectal cancer, is the third most common cancer in men and women, and also is the third leading cause of cancer-related deaths in the U.S., according to the American Cancer Society. Research by the American Cancer Society has shown that incidence and mortality rates of colorectal cancer are higher in African-Americans than in Caucasians.

The Chris4Life Colon Cancer Foundation is dedicated to finding a cure for colorectal cancer, according to the foundation’s website. The website states until a cure is found, the Chris4Life Cancer Foundation is committed to improving the treatment experience for patients and caregivers and raising awareness about colon cancer.

Tomczak said she also is committed to raising awareness for the cause because colon cancer research is a very personal topic for her. Tomczak said her father was diagnosed with colon cancer in October 2012 and died from the disease April 22, 2013.

Tomczak said she always had considered shaving her head but gained the courage to do so following her father’s death.

“There’s many ways to keep them around, even when they’re gone. You can still honor them and keep them in your life. They can still impact your life even if they aren’t right there with you.”

- Senior center Michalina Tomczak

Tomczak and Gassensmith shaved their heads in support of the Chris4Life Colon Cancer Foundation.

“Hair is just hair,” Gassensmith said. “I felt no different. I looked in the mirror and still saw myself. Nothing had changed. Hair is not essential to happiness. It will grow back, and it’s not the end of the world. I’m more confident than I was before. It increased my self-esteem. It’s empowering and freeing.”

Although Gassensmith does not have a personal connection to colon cancer, she said she shaved her head in support of Tomczak’s cause. Gassensmith said because the disease was such a big part of Tomczak’s life, she wanted to support Tomczak throughout the entire process.

Gassensmith said she feels great about donating her hair because when she uses the first time she has don-

ated her hair, but in the first time she has completely shaved it. She said she always donates at least 20 inches and is proud to give what she can to the cause.

“If you’ve never done this before, that’s fine,” Gassensmith said. “If you’ve never shaved your head, that’s fine, too. But if you’ve never done anything about colon cancer, that’s not fine.”