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Alyssa Messick, a freshman political science major, holds a candle in honor of Christopher Reeve, who died two years ago on Tuesday. ORACLE PHOTO/JOSH CORBAN

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## A night for remembrance

**A group of 25 students gathered outside Cooper Hall on Tuesday to pay respect to Christopher Reeve and his devotion to stem cell research.**

**David Guidi**

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The USF Chapter of the Student Society for Stem Cell Research (SSCR) held a candlelight vigil outside Cooper Hall last night to honor the memory of Christopher Reeve, an internationally known advocate for the use of stem cells in the treatment of spinal cord injuries.

Twenty-three other SSCR chapters across the nation held similar vigils last night as part of a campaign to raise awareness about the possibilities of stem cell therapy for spinal cord injuries, which they hope will dispel the idea that spinal cord injuries are incurable.

"A cure for spinal cord injury might not happen within the next two, three or even five years, but it's definitely inevitable and it's going to happen," SSCR President Sriram Modhusoodanen said.

About 25 students attended the vigil, each one lighting a candle and sharing their hopes for the future of stem cell research and its potential treatment possibilities, which some scientists believe could help millions.

"This candle symbolizes the endless possibilities for the countless people whose lives could be changed by the possibilities of stem cell research," SSCR Vice President Stefanie Butera said.

This was the third candlelight vigil held by the SSCR in memoriam of Christopher Reeve, who died from complications associated with his injuries on Oct. 10, 2004. The late actor, who was best known for his role as Superman, became an internationally recognized advocate for stem cell research after a horse-riding accident left him paralyzed from the neck down in 1995. Since then, the Christopher Reeve foundation has awarded more than \$64 million for research into treatment for spinal cord injuries.

"He was the voice," Butera said. "He opened the eyes of the world."

SSCR members were also trying to gather signatures to get an amendment on the ballot that would make \$20 million dollars of Florida state funds available for embryonic stem cell research.

National debate over stem cell research, which has been a hot political topic over the last few years, intensified in July when President Bush vetoed House Resolution 810, a bill that would have allowed federal funding for research using human embryonic stem cells that were created, but not used, for in vitro fertilization procedures.

Recent medical breakthroughs - most notably experiments conducted in 2005 by John's Hopkins researchers using embryonic stem cells to restore motor function in paralyzed rats - have given hope to those suffering from paralysis and other spinal cord injuries and intensified efforts of stem cell research advocates to increase funding.

Over the past year, the USF chapter of SSCR has sponsored stem cell research debates and lectures by speakers who are experts on issues related to stem cell research. They also are involved in efforts to organize citizens to lobby for pro-stem cell research legislation. SSCR also advocates stem cell research for the treatment of more than 70 other disorders scientists think could be treated with stem cell therapy, most notably Parkinson's disease and Alzheimer's disease, degenerative diseases affecting millions of Americans.

Manny Frank, a junior majoring in pre-med, attended the vigil with his father and mother, who has suffered from Parkinson's for the last four years.

"There is not a day that goes by that I don't think about it," Frank said. "It's really hard. I hope that in her lifetime something gets done."

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