

12 Years later, Barb Hartwell remains at forefront of fundraising for husband's tribute run



By Brock Weir

"You would have to know Bob to know he just has that full little smile on his face and doesn't say anything," says Barb Hartwell with a laugh, as she recalls the 2014 Run/Walk for Southlake.

Initially founded in 2002 in memory of her husband, former Aurora Councillor and enthusiastic runner Bob Hartwell, what has eventually evolved from the Hartwell Challenge to the Nature's Emporium Run/Walk For Southlake has a devoted supporter in Barb.

As pledges for the annual fundraiser benefiting Southlake Regional Health Centre came to a close last week, and the final totals continue to be tallied, Ms. Hartwell sits near the top of the leaderboard as an individual fundraiser. Through money pledged to her and her team, Sweaty Socks for Southlake, have well surpassed their team goal of \$2,000 with over \$4,000 raised so far. Individually, she has surpassed her \$500 goal with nearly \$2,700.

Sweaty Socks for Southlake is comprised of Ms. Hartwell, the employees of Hartwell Thayer Insurance, and their respective friends and family. Many of these members, particularly Ms. Hartwell, have been involved since the very beginning.

It is particularly meaningful, she says, that this event not only continues to honour her late husband, but continues to provide vital support for the local hospital.

"Southlake is such a huge part of the community," she says. "This is a community event that a lot of businesses and local people are becoming involved in and putting together their own teams. We have our own staff here who are like family to us and we encourage them to get involved, open it up to their friends, family and children and encourage them to run together as friends."

When asked what goes through her mind when she sees numbers swell each year, each body on the tarmac, she said, translates into further support for Southlake.

"Ever since I knew Bob, he ran," she recalls. "He was a very dedicated man, but there are two parts to this. One is the running, which he really did for himself. He always ran with a group of people and became friends with groups of runners. They ran Boston a few times together, they trained in the community and Bob's dream was always to have a marathon or half-marathon in Aurora because our terrain is challenging and a great location for runners."

?A bigger part of the piece is he was so involved in the community in everything he did, that Southlake is just such a good fit for what he believed in. I think that passion from the community shows in all the people who get involved in the run now and it is so wonderful to see all the kids out there.?

As she says he is probably looking down with that knowing smile, the enthusiasm she says she experiences on the ground is catching. It is a bug that has bitten her staff too.

?When people come out to see the participants and the fun they are having, and even the enthusiasm of the warm-up and the speeches, to be a part of that and know the money is going to a good cause, I just can't see how people would not want to participate!?

As they get ready to look back on another successful year, Ms. Hartwell says she and members of the organizing committee would love to see more involvement in the run from local schools. Once reconstruction is completed on Newmarket's Davis Drive, another objective is considering the feasibility of using the landmark archway which spans the thoroughfare outside the hospital as either the start or end point of the run, underscoring the importance of Southlake.