

Family's tush push? continues to grow



By Brock Weir

Tanya Shepherd did not take everything with her when she lost her battle with colon cancer in 2009.

In the five months it took from her initial diagnosis for her valiant fight to come to an end, she was not one to take matters, as it were, sitting down.

She founded 'Tanya's Tushies', a group of women and their families to get their rears into gear and raise money and awareness for colon cancer.

Today, this legacy is carried on by her sisters and sisters-in-law, and the Shepherd women were out in full force in Aurora for the annual 'Push for Your Tush', benefiting Colon Cancer Canada.

The Shepherds' Jen from Schomberg, Kate from Kettleby, and Holly from Newmarket, were just one of several teams who came to run or walk in memory of a loved one, to support someone currently in the fight, or those who emerged from the fight victorious.

'We were looking for somewhere to show our support and somewhere to keep Tanya's memory alive, somewhere we could help,' said Jen. 'We stumbled across Colon Cancer Canada, and talking to [founder Amy Elmaleh] we decided this is where we want to put in our efforts and that is how we decided to start our Aurora walk.'

Since the foundation of Tanya's Tushies, they have raised nearly \$40,000 for Colon Cancer Canada and, with the help of fellow 'Tushie' Kathy Cardon, they have ensured Aurora's run continues to flourish year after year. The choice of Aurora, for a family that is rather spread through York Region, was a strategic one.

'We wanted to draw from a lot of York Region and this is a little bit more central,' said Jen. 'People have actually heard of it, as Schomberg is not as popular! We just loved the venue when we found it. The trail goes through a little wooded area and it is perfect. We have been so happy with the results. The first year we quadrupled our expectations and it blew us away.'

'We thought we had to keep up the momentum and last year we did even more than we expected. We have seen the same few teams come back, we have seen a few teams each year, which is amazing, and we are just continually surprised by our results and thrilled that the word is getting out, the message is getting out there, and we're still doing it.'

Another pair of sisters, hailing from Holland Landing, were joined by a friend in support at the Run. Heather and Denise McConnell participated in the run with their father last year. Sadly, he too lost his battle, but they, and friend Rachel Velema, soldier on.

“For us last year it was a great way support our dad through all his treatments and be there for him,” said Heather. “Today it is more to remember him and support other people who are suffering with it.”

Colon Cancer Canada was founded by Ms. Elmaleh after her own mother fought and lost to the disease. Her family, she said, was hit hard by an issue nobody was talking about. Whether it was a cancer people liked to keep “hush-hush”, or whether it was simply an awareness issue, they set about to make a difference.

“The doctors said all the time that if my mom had been screened for colon cancer 10 years earlier, she would still be here today and she would know my children, but she is not,” said Amy. “Nobody really wants to talk about this disease because of the tests, because of where it has to go, what you have to do, but it would really be much better to have a colonoscopy or a screening test than getting colon cancer.”

“We still have a lot more to do because there are over 20,000 Canadians being diagnosed every year with colon cancer, so we clearly need to be making more noise for people who are touched.”