

Local resident supports Southlake Run after hospital saves his life



By Emily Wood

For the past 25 years, Aurora resident John Hartman has selected one charity per year to throw his support behind. This year, his chosen cause happens to be the one that saved his life just last year.

And it all happened in 37 minutes.

John was used to a fast-paced lifestyle, working as many as 60 hours a week and travelling back and forth across North America. In January 2016, he began to experience some alarming symptoms, including shortness of breath and tightness in his chest ? but with no family history of heart disease, John chalked it up to the 125 nights he'd spent in hotels the year before, combined with a less-than-perfect diet and exercise regime.

Convinced that it was nothing serious, he paid a visit to his family doctor, expecting a simple solution. His family doctor had different ideas, and recommended that John see a cardiac specialist.

Fearing a blockage in one of his arteries, he was sent for an angiogram at Southlake Regional Health Centre in Newmarket, a hospital home to the third largest Regional Cardiac Care Program in Ontario that serves more than 10,000 patients each year. Even then, John says he was in denial about the worst case scenario.

He was awake during the procedure that revealed a 95 per cent blockage in his LAD artery, and was told then and there that they would need to put a stent in immediately. 37 minutes after lying down on the table, the stent was in place and the dangerous blockage had been cleared.

?It was surreal,? says John. ?But looking back, it was exceptional care. And it was exceptional care in my community. I don't know if I could use the words 'world-renowned', but it sure felt like that.?

More than anything, his experience had been a wake-up call. After the procedure, John was determined to do anything he could to avoid winding up back in the hospital. He took advantage of the cardiac rehab classes on healthy eating, how to shop for healthier food at the grocery store, and how to manage stress.

He's since lost almost 20 pounds, and has rediscovered a love of cooking healthy, wholesome meals ? although he does admit he sometimes finds himself cheating just a little.

?I'm human. I'm never going to be an Olympic athlete, but I feel better. I keep on telling my kids, Dad plans to live forever. And so far I'm doing just that.?

Having spent his career as a fundraising executive, John is a philanthropist in both his professional and personal lives. To maximize his impact, he selects one charity or cause to support every year, a promise he says is important to his family, friends, and extended network who he invites to join him with their support. After being touched so directly by Southlake's care through his own experience, as well as his wife, Sarah's, successful cancer treatment at the Stronach Regional Cancer Centre recently, this year John says it was an easy choice to make.

?I've always believed in keeping it local when it comes to philanthropy,? he says. ?I like that when I'm giving my money, I can

physically point to that building and say where it's going, and that's where the support is.?

And he'll be able to do just that as he participates for the first time in the 2017 Run or Walk for Southlake, presented by Nature's Emporium, this year celebrating its 15th anniversary. Most notably, the event has moved to Davis Drive for the milestone event, with the 5 km route travelling right past the hospital and under the iconic Southlake bridge.

?There's general excitement in the community about this event,? he says. ?The anniversary, the route, passing under the bridge ? it's a big deal.?

Knowing how fortunate he was to have access to world-class cardiac care so close to home, John jumped at the opportunity to support the event. For him, it's the perfect way to give back to the nurses, physicians, and therapists who played a part in his care and recovery.

?I'm a big believer in giving back to your community,? he says. ?And to tell you the truth, it's easy. Asking for money when you've got a great cause shouldn't be difficult, and I think Southlake is a great cause.?

You can make a donation to John or join him at the Run or Walk for Southlake, presented by Nature's Emporium on Sunday, April 30. Funds raised through this event support the purchase of new and replacement equipment that is urgently needed across the hospital. Register or donate today at runforsouthlake.ca.