

?Soccer Sisters? ramp up Relay for Life efforts



By Brock Weir

Aurora's Relay for Life, which will take over the lawns of Magna International on Friday, June 7 going all night until the following morning, is often an evening of celebration and reflection as people celebrate cancer survivors and reflect on those who were unable to be there.

Next week, the ?Soccer Sisters? will once again be taking the field in memory of one of their own. The team is currently in third place in the fundraising standings of the annual event hosted by the Canadian Cancer Society.

They are a group of women, friends and family, who have come together to remember Baha El-Dassouki, an Aurora resident who herself was a long-time contributor to the Society before being diagnosed with the disease, which she fought until the end.

Baha's daughters all play soccer and when they came together with her cousins, friends and their families, they wanted to remember her.

?We were going to name it in her name, but it wasn't just about her,? says Gwen Al-Kas, a cousin and long-time friend. ?It was about everyone who has lost someone. You're doing this not only in memory of people, but for the survivors as well and we just thought it would be a fun team name.?

Ms. Al-Kas initially became involved with the Relay through another team. Her family is, unfortunately, well versed in the cancer journey, having herself lost five aunts and uncles and six cousins to the disease. As her family grappled with the disease, she said she was struck by the work the Society performs within the community to patients and their families, putting up ?no closed doors? to anyone who might need assistance.

?Baha was strong and never gave up hope, and encouraged me to never stop Relay for Life,? she says. ?That is the reason why I have formed a team with her three daughters, not only in her memory, but in honour of the fact she encouraged us. That's what makes me want to go on with her team and here we are today.?

To date, the Soccer Sisters are zeroing in on the \$7,000 fundraising mark in the final week before the big day. They raised their money not only through the personal donations of themselves, their families, and friends, but also through their annual garage sales, which in themselves takes months of preparation gathering things throughout the whole year from their vast network of friends and

neighbours.

While on the ground participating in the relay, the group keeps it fun not only demonstrating their soccer skills, but through karaoke, makeshift 'candy stations', lots of good food, including surprise potluck. By the time 7 a.m. rolls around the next morning, Ms. Al-Kas says she, her daughters and the rest of the team feel a huge sense of accomplishment and see the world in a different light. Between the hours of 3 and 6 a.m., however, there always comes a time when one is almost overcome by the sleepiness and, more often than not, the cool, wet rain.

'You're uncomfortable but god knows we're not as uncomfortable as cancer patients in the middle of the night,' she says. 'Sure, you break down for about half an hour and say, 'God, I just wish I could go to sleep or go to my car,' but I stare at the stars and think, 'These patients have to live with this every night. They have the pain on top of it, I don't, and what keeps me going is the luminaries that are lit for those people who have fought and lost, and the people who are fighting and winning.'

For more information on Aurora's Relay for Life, visit www.relayforlife.ca/aurora.