

Volunteering for Sunday's Southlake Run is ?perfect way to give back?

By Jake Courtepatte

If you have lived in York Region long enough, chances are you or a loved one have experienced the top quality care of the Southlake Regional Health Centre.

For Brian North, Aurora's 2012 Citizen of the Year, his mother passed away there just over nine years ago.

?The hospital was phenomenal,? said North. ?They treat you well there, and deserve the assistance of the community for all they do for the community.?

But the facility's reputation stretches much farther back, back to the days when it was known simply as York County Hospital. King Councillor Avia Eek's connection with the hospital has stretched the length of her life as well as her family's.

?I was born there, my husband was born there, my kids were born there?it's a family affair.?

At the tender age of two, her son lost the end of his ring finger in a door-slamming accident. Ten minutes later she arrived at the hospital, and an hour later an on-call plastic surgeon had the distraught child's finger sewed back on.

?That's just one of the ways the hospital has been there for us. We've had great experiences, the level of professionalism is unbelievable?it's the perfect way to give back.?

This Sunday marks the annual Run or Walk for Southlake presented by Nature's Emporium, a 10km, 5km, or 2.5km walk or run to raise funds for new or replacement hospital equipment.

?Right now they need something like \$80 million just to upgrade,? said North.

For Eek, she worries that while many people are willing to donate their time and money, most don't understand the magnitude of the hospital's financial situation. The emergency department was originally designed to service 40,000 people. In 2014, it serviced 99,000.

?As our community is growing, so are our needs for the hospital. We need donations from anyone?businesses, individuals?you don't even have to run to donate.?

Both North and Eek have been privy to the inside workings of the run for some years now, both serving on the committee board since it was known as the Hartwell Challenge in the mid-00s.

The talented 15-member committee includes Southlake Board member Steve Hinder and Aurora Councillor Michael Thompson.

?They're tremendous, community-minded people,? said Eek. We've got quite a cross-section of volunteers from the Aurora, Newmarket, Bradford and King area.?

As the run grows in volunteers and participants every year, so does the need for more space. This year marks the first time the run will be held at the Stronach Aurora Recreation Centre on Wellington Street East, moving away from the Aurora Community Centre.

?We're hoping the move allows for a more relaxed and comfortable experience,? said North. ?We've got plenty of room for activities for the kids, like face painting and a bouncy balloon, some mascots will be walking around. Plus there's room for more volunteers, if people so wish.?

As of press time, the run has raised just under \$100,000, with an ultimate goal of \$175,000. Usually a large influx of funds comes in

the day-of or after the run, when community members see the enormous support for the cause.

?If anyone has a chance to be there Sunday, I suggest they get out there,? said Eek. ?The way the crowd gets pumped up, you've got the music going, you've got the activities for the kids, you've got the runners getting excited?it's quite a sight.?

For more information on volunteering, running, or becoming a donor/sponsor, visit www.runforsouthlake.ca. Donations can be made up to two weeks after

Sunday's run.