

Aurora resident raises thousands for cancer care ? one step at a time



Louis Dimopoulos had an early start on Thursday morning when he left Toronto's Princess Margaret Hospital.

Twenty-to-six can be a daunting time for any of us to start our day, but it was anything but a typical morning when he set out on University Avenue, made the brief walk eastward to Yonge Street, and headed due north.

He wasn't headed for the Subway or Union Station, he was headed back home, to make a difference ? on foot.

His destination: Southlake Health.

His objective: Raising money for cancer care.

Once upon a time, whenever the Aurora resident saw hospital foundations seek contributions, he often wondered where the money actually went. The answers to his questions became all too clear when he started his own cancer journey in 2016, just a week after his wife, Julie Di Lorenzo, told him they were expecting their third child.

?I was in the same doctor's office being told I had cancer,? he says. ?It was a little weird, but things took off from there; I did some tests, did some scans, and basically within the week I was told I had testicular cancer, they had to remove the tumour tomorrow, and we're going to go from there.?

Following the initial surgery, his recovery was going well, but it was then discovered the cancer had spread to his abdomen.

For the next month, Princess Margaret Hospital became a second home.

They welcomed their third child in the interim and, thankfully, after that last round of treatment, was told there was no evidence of disease.

?I've always questioned where the money goes [and] unfortunately I experienced exactly where it goes, how it's applied, and the amazing services they support,? he says, noting the stellar support his young family also received along the way. ?I never wanted to be there and I remember going there the first time and I was like, ?Why am I here?' I was in denial. I didn't want to be there. I didn't want to see the things that I saw, but little did I realize that that was the best place for me to be. There was nowhere else that I should have been except there. It really awakened my eyes to what's trivial and what's not.?

It underscored to him that "what you put out is what comes back" and he's taken that sentiment to heart.

He began giving back in 2019 by participating in Movember, a cross-country fundraiser where men grow mustaches "and collect pledges along the way" to support men's health initiatives. His first goal was to raise \$500, but ultimately realized \$1,300.

The following year, he raised \$3,000 and then \$5,000 in the subsequent year.

"As I got into year four, I really felt I had an understanding about charities and how hard it is for them to consistently ask for donations "I guess people want to get a bang for their buck, so charities are always trying double-the-impact stuff."

A story about an Aurora resident walking to Barrie for charity inspired Dimopoulos to think big and he soon planned a walk from Toronto to Aurora.

The first walk raised \$10,000 and this year he upped the ante by extending his destination to Newmarket's Southlake Health to increase both awareness and interest in his efforts.

"I think next year I've got to either find something else to do because this is killing me, or I have to go even further," he jokes adding with a laugh that if Southlake moves its main campus northward from Newmarket, a few more steps might be in his future.

"Overall, in the seven years, I've raised almost \$63,000. My overall goal is to hit \$100,000. I always joke that I wish I could just win the lottery and cut a cheque for \$1 million and say, "Here you go, now we're even!" The thing that really blows my mind is just the support of the people "and it's even people I don't know. I just want to bring to light the amazing things that are happening in regards to cancer research and the steps they're making.

"I don't think we realize how fortunate we are that we have one of the top five cancer centres in the world not that far away from us and the advancements they have made and are continuing to make are crazy because every year our survival rate increase across the board for all cancers."

By Brock WeirEditorLocal Journalism Initiative Reporter