

?Dancing for Life? continues reign as top Relay fundraisers



By Jeff Doner

The Somerville Dance Academy in Richmond Hill one again submitted a full team to the annual Relay for Life, once again rising to the top by raising over \$21,000 for the Canadian Cancer Society this year.

The Dancing for Life team has been involved for nine years now, giving them over \$100,000 raised in that time, and they were honoured earlier this month for passing that milestone mark.

The team was started by Michelle Marshall with a group of dancers and their families from the studio and is now captained by dancer instructors Amanda Lytle, Calli Barnea and Danielle Di Giacomo.

Lytle said the team started when a parent of a former dancer at the Academy, who has since gone professional, passed away from cancer. It is also in memory of another parent, Barb Studdard, who played a big part in the Academy's annual dance recital.

?Pretty much everybody on the team has been touched or affected by cancer in some way,? Lytle said. ?We have some families with parents that are suffering right now.?

The whole Academy gets involved, giving them about 35 members, among a few more volunteers, to help out with their fundraising efforts.

The Dancing for Life team raises a large chunk of their funds from their dance showcase each year in December, usually held in Aurora.

However, they also hold bake sales, dance workshops, Pie Your Teacher in the Face night at the studio and other events. They also teamed up with Menchies in Oak Ridges for an event and a car wash at the Aurora Highlands car lot.

Lytle has played a big part in organizing the team recently and said it's an event the entire Academy looks forward to each year.

?It's a very emotional event,? she said, ahead of Relay. ?The idea is that cancer never sleeps, so neither will we and you're supposed to have one member of your team walking on the track all night. It's pretty amazing. In the opening ceremony, they usually have a speaker that has been touched by cancer in some way and they tell us their story, which is pretty motivating.?

She also cited the luminary ceremony where people light candles to remember others or show their support in their journey with cancer as a memorable moment.

?We light those at dusk and it's just amazing to see them all,? she said. ?That's usually the most emotional part and it's touching to

see.?