

Lace up this weekend to support local Hospice care

If you're planning to lace up for a walk this weekend, consider heading to Newmarket's Fairy Lake to support local hospice care.

This Saturday, May 13, Margaret Bahen Hospice and Doane House Hospice will host their first in-person Hike for Hospice event since the start of the global pandemic.

The sixth-annual event invites people who have been touched by hospice, and members of the community at large, to get out and walk, raising money for essential hospice palliative care services that benefit the entire York Region community.

This year, the Hospice duo have set a fundraising goal of \$80,000 to facilitate end-of-life care in the community.

?We're really excited to be back,? says Camile Garzon, Manager of Fund Development. ?It's really for the community, along with volunteers, staff and hospice families, to come together and walk in honour or in memory of their loved ones, or as a general support of our hospices and the programs we provide in the community. It's really a great time for us because we're able to come together and have an actual celebration in person with everyone in attendance.?

?Celebration? is often what drives the hospice community. In addition to end-of-life care at the Margaret Bahen Hospice residence just behind Southlake Regional Health Centre, staff and volunteers really focus on creating what they call ?hospice moments? for residents and their families.

Over the last year, they have been able to bring ponies over to delight residents and their families, and recently animal handlers brought in a baby kangaroo to bring smiles to the faces of each resident as the joey went from room to room.

Now and throughout the pandemic, Margaret Bahen has maintained a 93 per cent occupancy rate of their rooms, which means that people are receiving quality care at the end of their lives ? but that, in turn, results in a significant strain on the bottom line. That's where Hike For Hospice helps to bridge the gap.

?Our efforts are going towards our operational costs for Hospice,? says Garzon. ?Each year, we receive government funding and this covers our nursing and Personal Support Worker staff salaries, but it does leave us with a gap of \$950,000 each year to cover our operational costs ? things like electricity, volunteer programs, recreation therapy programs and other things in the Hospice to make it feel like a home. To fill that gap, we look at our special events, donations from the community, but rely heavily on special events such as our Hike for Hospice.

?We are setting out to reach this fundraising goal with all of the funds going towards our hospices and staying directly in the York Region community. We do provide free of charge services. We don't charge for any beds or any services here at Margaret Bahen hospice and that's all free for the community. In order to continue providing that, we need to raise all the necessary funds through the Hike for Hospice. Support from the community is vital in helping us get to our goal.?

The best part is participating in the Hike for Hospice is that it's fun for the whole family.

?There is an excitement factor to being back in person and families are looking forward to seeing the staff that they got to know while they were at Hospice and seeing volunteers they have met, and also connecting with each other and with community members who have been through similar experiences,? says Garzon. ?We also have a lot of new families who are looking to support all in memory of their loved ones.

?It's going to be a really fun day. There are going to be maybe upwards of 100 people there, so it will be a large event and we're hopeful that we get participants out. They will take part in a hike around Fairy Lake, one loop around the lake, and after the hike we'll join together for a barbecue and other activities as well [such as] a flower activity as a way for families to do something in

honour or memory of their loved ones.?

Hike for Hospice will take place at Fairy Lake on Saturday, May 13, with check-in beginning at 9 a.m. The Hike will begin at 10 a.m. with the barbecue lunch set for 11.30 a.m. For more information, visit www.myhospice.ca/hikeforhospice.

By Brock WeirEditorLocal Journalism Initiative Reporter