

Run/Walk for Southlake has \$1 million milestone in sight



By Brock Weir

With just under six weeks until the annual Nature's Emporium Run/Walk for Southlake, excitement is not only building among local runners, but also among event organizers who are zeroing in on a milestone goal.

This year's run, which will be held at the Stronach Aurora Recreation Complex ? a switch from its long-time home at the Aurora Community Centre ? on April 25 will set out on Wellington Street East, heading in that direction before heading north on Leslie Street into Newmarket and back again.

If runners help the Run meet their \$175,000 fundraising goal this year, they will cross the finish line into the history books as the annual event will have raised a whopping \$1 million for Southlake Regional Health Centre since its inception.

?A lot of people think by just registering they are raising money for the hospital,? said event co-chair Robin Taylor Smith at last week's official kick-off. ?Registering is just covering the cost of the event. Pledging and giving money is money that helps the hospital. The Ontario Government does not give the hospital money for equipment or infrastructure needs, and that is what [these funds] will help the hospital with.

?This year will be a really big year [as] meeting [that goal] will be fabulous. Together, York Region and the surrounding community, we can do it because our community cares about the hospital. Let's do it.?

Added Neila Poscente, CEO of the Southlake Regional Health Centre Foundation: ?You only hit the \$1 million milestone once!? Eager to pick up the gauntlet this year is Jamie Pimek, ambassador for this year's Run or Walk.

Mr. Pimek was 31 when he was diagnosed with colon cancer and said he learned firsthand the value of receiving treatment close to home.

?When you're going through the chemotherapy treatment and basically feeling horrible at the end of the day, the first thing you want to do is get home,? he said. ?I can't imagine what it would have been like having to travel two hours to get from the facility back to your own home.

?[There are no words] to describe how grateful I am to have a facility so close to my home and just the fantastic people I encountered along the way. I thought to myself this was going to be the longest, most drawn-out portion of my life and, believe it or not, it was one of the smoothest. Even though it was difficult, it went by very quickly and a lot of it had to do with the facilities that

were available and the wonderful people I encountered along the way. Your gift transformed my life.?

As went through chemotherapy, Mr. Pimek said he promised himself that afterwards he wanted to get involved in something. He didn't know what that might be, but he eventually decided the avenue to do so was obvious in supporting the Southlake Foundation.

?I feel so grateful to be involved and to be able to tell people about the wonderful care I received so close to my home,? he said.

To show this gratitude, he has brought together his family and friends to enter a team in this year's Run/Walk and his employers have stepped up to the plate to form a team of their own. In total, 40 people ? and counting ? will be walking for Jamie and other loved ones who have battled cancer.

They will be in good company as Telus has stepped up to the plate with a 100-strong team to help the Run cross that \$ 1 million mark. This will be a first time entry for Telus, inspired by the journey of colleague Hugh Johnson, who is battling stage four lung cancer which has since metastasized.

?Hugh represents a lot to me personally,? said Tom Nemeth, Manager of Sales for Telus. ?He is a mentor to me, he is the greatest guy you'll ever meet, and we're going to try and push him through the course and walk parts of the course. It is still very early in his treatment and he is committed to beating it. With the help of Southlake, I know he is going to do that.?

The Nature's Emporium Run or Walk for Southlake was founded in 2002 as the Hartwell Challenge, a run established to pay tribute to long-time Aurora businessman and councillor Bob Hartwell.

To register, pledge, and to find more information on the Run, visit www.runforsouthlake.ca.