

Terry Fox Run is an enduring Aurora tradition



By Brock Weir

Aurora's Rod Leonard was standing on the corner of Yonge Street and Gamble Road when Terry Fox appeared on the horizon.

It was 1980 and the Canadian Icon was nearing the premature end of his Marathon of Hope across Canada to raise money for cancer research.

As Fox got closer, Mr. Leonard kept his eye on the man standing with his kids on the opposite corner.

?We saw Terry Fox come towards us and [the man] emptied his pockets and gave the money to his children to put in the basket,? he recalls. ?It was a very emotional moment for me.?

It wasn't something he had an emotional connection to from the beginning, however. He and his wife watched on television when Terry Fox left the east coast on the first part of his journey. Being a teacher, he thought it was great a teenager like Fox could have the energy, tenacity, and determination to do something so gruelling all for a good cause.

?Like many people, I didn't get as emotionally involved until he came into Ontario,? he says. ?Then you became aware of what he was doing and how great it was. To me, he represented all the good things about young people and he was so inspirational to everyone bringing cancer to a national front.?

It was something he wanted to help instill in his own students and when school came back that September, he set out to do something about it. Before the annual Terry Fox Run was established nation-wide in its namesake's memory, Mr. Leonard, along with local companies such as Caruso's and McDonalds, combined their efforts for Aurora's very first Terry Fox Run.

Now, as walks in memory of Terry Fox continue to spring up around the country and internationally well over 30 years after his death, it is a local tradition that continues to endure in Aurora. This year's Aurora Terry Fox Run will take place next Sunday, September 15, at Sheppard's Bush.

Consisting of a 5km street route or a 2km trail route designed for families, registration begins at 8.30 a.m. with the Run getting underway at 10 a.m.

The Run is open to everyone from runners to walkers, to people in bikes, rollerblades, pushing strollers, pulling wagons, or walking their pets.

?I thought this would probably be a one-shot thing, but once he died, and they made it national, I realised how great it was,? says Mr. Leonard. ?I had no idea it would last as long as it has. For a while, there is a lot of enthusiasm for it, but I think something like the Terry Fox run touches virtually everybody in North America.

?We all know friends and relatives that have cancer and I think there is an emotional aspect for all of us.?

When asked what goes through his mind when he sees people coming back year after year ? along with many new faces each year ? to something to which he helped lay the foundation, he says it means there was something out there that was good for the greater community.

?A lot of times we go through this world and we don't always help people the way we should,? he says. ?It makes me feel good that there is people helping other people and there is a reason for caring. That is what is important to me.?

Over the years he has watched the Terry Fox Run grow locally, Mr. Leonard says the key is that every little bit counts. He doesn't put himself in the category of a ?great donator? but little donations from everybody wanting to participate make it all worthwhile.

Since the Terry Fox Run was established 33 years ago, the campaign has expanded across the country, reaching 225 communities in Ontario alone last year, inspired nearly 4,000 school events raising nearly \$12 million for cancer research. To date, the Terry Fox Foundation has raised over \$600 million for cancer research worldwide.

And that number continues to grow.

?Each year you see many of the same faces, but what's great is you see new, young people who weren't even alive when Terry fox came out,? says Mr. Leonard. ?They have heard of him and the legend and legacy he has left. The really great thing is young people in schools are willing to carry the torch that has been carried by many of the older people. For a lot of them, it was their parents and grandparents that inspired them.

?You don't have to run in the Terry Fox Run. You just have to participate. You can see young people on bicycles and tricycles; you'll see mothers pushing babies in carriages; and you'll see elderly people in particular who used to do the run now do the walk; and people who can't physically participate donate.?

For more information on the Terry Fox Run, including registration and pledges for the Aurora Run, visit www.terryfox.org.