

York Regional Police run for Special Olympics in memory of detective



By Jake Courtepatte

The York Regional Police are ensuring one of their own's passion for the Special Olympics lives on forever.

Rob Plunkett, a strong ambassador for the Special Olympics in life, lives on in death through the annual Race for Plunkett, held Wednesday at Riverwalk Commons in Newmarket.

"Rob Plunkett's passion for Special Olympics, and his leadership, has always motivated members of our police service and the community to get involved," said Thomas Carrique, York Regional Police deputy chief. "This event is a testament to Rob's legacy, as both a person and a police officer."

Though the torch run by law enforcement was celebrating its thirtieth anniversary this year, it was the ninth to be named in honour of Plunkett, who served as chair of the 2000 Special Olympics Spring Games in York Region.

Plunkett was the victim of a botched car theft in August of 2007. After his death, two other York Region officers stepped in to take on his role as the coordinator of the torch run, which now accepts citizens outside of law enforcement and draws hundreds of participants each year.

A gold medalist at the Canadian Police Olympics and the "Toughest Cop Alive" contest, his love for sports fueled his passion to get as many people as possible into the game.

"Rob was committed to helping people be the best that they could be," said Carrique. "He is really a shining example for all of us." The event, which begins in the Commons and follows routes of both five and ten-kilometres, raised over \$30,000, all of which goes to the Special Olympics program.

Over the past three years, the event alone has raised over \$90,000 for Special Olympics.

Both the 2013 Summer Games Legacy Fund and YRP Association donated \$2,500 to the cause. The Lang family were the highest team fundraisers, bringing in over \$2,700, while the highest individual total went to Michelle Paddison.

"It's great to see so many people dedicated to such a cause," said Newmarket Mayor Tony Van Bynen. "There are many things you can be doing on a Wednesday, but the fact that all of these people are here today making a positive difference in the lives of others is something everyone should be proud of."

As is tradition, prior to the run, members of Special Olympics Ontario carried the torch across the grounds of the Commons to the podium before reciting the Special Olympics motto: "Let me win. But if I cannot win, let me be brave in the attempt."

Registration fees and donations to the event went directly to supporting athletes living with intellectual disabilities, helping cover the cost of transportation, programming, uniforms, and more