

375 run to keep focus on fighting pancreatic cancer

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The Sixth Annual Run for George drew 375 participants at the Upper School in Englewood Cliffs Nov. 15. Some came to run or walk the 5K around local streets. Others came for the Greek food, the children's games, massages, the music and the silent auction.



PHOTO COURTESY OF DAVID CLIFF

Roughly 375 runners and walkers complete a 5K in honor of George Rubis, an Englewood Cliffs resident who died from pancreatic cancer. The annual run has raised a total of \$360,000 since it was first started.

Run for George is held in honor of George Rubis, a longtime Englewood Cliffs resident who with his wife Bertha, raised three daughters, Stacy Rubis, Sophia Duffy and Pauline Rubis. George, a marathon runner, died of pancreatic cancer at 63 in 1998.

This disease, known as the silent killer, has a 99 percent mortality rate.

"It's not funded correctly," said Bertha. "If nothing is done in the form of research, then it will always be a fatal disease. That's why my daughters decided to do something about it. To raise money in their father's memory and to help with research and help other people at the same time."

As a result, the daughters started Run for George in 2003. "They're not just good daughters; they're good people, very charitable, like their father. They spent many, many months planning this and it's worth all their tiredness," said Bertha.

This year, Run for George had more than 180 donors, including corporate and individual sponsors and raised more than \$60,000. All of the proceeds go directly to Johns Hopkins University in Maryland for research in pancreatic cancer.

"This event's very special not only because it honors a great man and a wonderful family, but it brings the community together. People donate their time and help one another. These volunteers make this a special town," said Englewood Cliffs Mayor Joseph C. Parisi, Jr.

Carol DeMaio of Norwalk, Conn. lost her mother to pancreatic cancer in January 2007 and found out about Run for George on the Internet.

"The circumstances are so close to home. It's so frustrating that there's no spotlight on this 'not-politically-correct' disease. But until the general public takes action – gets petitions, writes to senators and gets the government involved to fund research – nothing will change," DeMaio said. "We must get aggressive with the medical community so early detection will someday be possible, which is so badly needed for this type of cancer."

Dr. Laura Wood, a pathologist in the Pancreatic Research Group at Johns Hopkins University, spoke and was impressed by how many people want to make a difference. "This is my first time here and the coordination of community support is amazing," she said. "Technology is being developed. It's on the horizon, but not in the immediate future. Advances have been made in understanding the biology of the pancreatic genome to target future research and improve diagnosis and treatment."

In 2009, approximately 42,470 Americans will be diagnosed with pancreatic cancer and approximately, 35,240 will die from the disease.

"My father loved running, eating and shopping, which is why we offer a little bit of each, to reflect on all his passions," said Pauline Rubis of Cliffside Park.

"The girls do a fantastic job every year. They do their dad proud," said Kathy Amanatides of New Windsor, N.Y.

"There is money out there and my sisters and I are trying to direct that money to pancreatic cancer research, so like other cancers, there will be hope, screening and a cure. It will change. We just have to be patient and work toward that goal," said Stacy Rubis.

Cathy Bartzos of Englewood Cliffs said, "Great community event involving the whole family. The Rubis and Duffy families are very active with the community and we're really proud to support them and the cause."

Sophia Duffy said, "We love hosting this event every year. My father was a great man, helpful and giving. Because this cancer is a silent killer, it's up to the families to bring awareness. Once we get the funding, there could be early detection and a cure."

Seeing behind the veneer of the games and music, even the younger participants knew the serious message of Sunday's event.

"There are so many fund-raisers for other cancers, but not enough for pancreatic cancer," said Kassandra Fotiadis, 13, of Montclair. "My granddad died of this disease."

While face painting, Lauren Choi and Dominique Elisano, both eighth-graders from Englewood Cliffs, said the event was "a fun way to support cancer."

Strategizing her next move for the ring toss, Isabella Heron, a seventh-grader from Englewood Cliffs, said, "It's a fun way for kids to have fun and still help out."

Taking a break from all the games, Ryan Duffy, an eighth-grader from Englewood Cliffs, had a quick snack. "It's fun for the whole family. The parents can auction and the kids play games and win prizes in the gym," he said. "And all the money goes to research."