

A story behind every race

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By Chantal Mendes, Globe Correspondent | May 7, 2009

Massachusetts is famous for its annual Boston Marathon. But for those unable to manage 26.2 miles, nearly every weekend offers walks and runs that are a lot easier on the knees and that also lend support to local charitable organizations.

Among a half-dozen events to be held in area communities Saturday morning, three are marking their fifth anniversaries: the 12,402 Steps to Cure Sarcoma Walk in Hudson, the Janis Bresnahan 5K Run for Education in Ayer, and the Gold's Gym 5K to support school programs in Millis.

Supporters of a new playground for Northborough's Proctor Elementary School are hosting a road race and walk, and two events will be supporting autism research and awareness: the Bear 5K in Carlisle, and the New England Center for Children's benefit race in Southborough.

And looking ahead a few weeks, a newcomer to the local calendar, the inaugural Paul's Run in Newton will raise money for research into heart disease.

Details about these events, and many others, can be found on sites such as www.coolrunning.com, which provides an extensive calendar of upcoming races, whether charitable or competitive, and draws participants from across the region.

Behind each of the fund-raising runs, however, are stories about the people or issues that inspired them.

The Newton 5K on May 24, for instance, will be the culmination of longtime efforts by Kristen St. Martin, who founded the Paul St. Martin Charitable Corporation after her father died at 47 of a heart attack in 2002. A resident of Mansfield, he had worked in Newton and enjoyed running through the city.

"For the past seven years I just have wanted to do something in his memory because he had a lot of impact on the people in the area," St. Martin said. "I think it's something that a lot of people can relate to, because heart disease affects a lot of people."

She said she settled on the fund-raising run as "a good way to bring people together, and having an athletic event is always good for heart disease."

Paul's Run is scheduled to begin at 8 a.m. at Weeks Field in Newton Centre. Participants can register for \$25 at www.paulstmartincharitablecorp.com before May 15, or \$30 on the morning of the race.

In Hudson, the Jennifer Hunter Yates Sarcoma Foundation walk on Saturday is tackling a less widely known but devastating health concern. A rare type of cancer that affects body tissue, sarcoma has a cure rate of approximately 30 percent if it is treated with surgery, chemotherapy, and radiation, according to the foundation's website.

Created in honor of Jennifer Hunter Yates, a Hudson native who died at age 33 in 2004 after a 17-month battle with the disease, the foundation has raised \$450,000 to support research and treatment efforts at Mass. General Hospital in Boston.

"In the four years that we've donated, Mass. General has quadrupled their clinical trials with sarcoma," said Susan Erickson, Jennifer's sister and chairwoman of the event. "People know that the money is well used. It will hopefully directly benefit someone else who has to go through what my sister did."

This weekend's 12,402 Steps to Cure Sarcoma Walk, with one step for every day that Yates lived, will begin at 10 a.m. at Hudson High School, where registration will open at 9 a.m. More information can be found at www.jenniferhunteryatessarcomafoundation.org.

A benefit with events for every age group, the Janis Bresnahan fund-raiser at Ayer High School will include a 5K run, a 2-mile walk, and a "Tot Trot" for the 6-and-under crowd, as well as family activities that turn it into a community gathering.

"They have face-painting and balloons and arts and crafts," said Heidi Hynes, director of the Ayer Education Foundation.

The event is held in memory of Janis Bresnahan, who grew up in Ayer and was cocaptain of the high school's track team before embarking on her career in early childhood education.

Registration begins at 8:30 a.m. Saturday. More information can be found at www.janisbresnahanforeducation.com. ■

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