

Communities set to come together for area hospital April 30 for Southlake Run]

Registration closes Friday

By Brock Weir

Karel Span is getting his last-minute stretches in this week to try to match his 2022 record.

Ahead of next weekend's Nature's Emporium Run for Southlake, which takes place outside the hospital on Sunday, April 30, the 78-year-old resident of King is looking to match or beat the 43 minutes he took to complete last year's run, the biggest annual fundraiser for Southlake Regional Health Centre.

The Run has long been a cause close to Span's heart and as Captain of the King Curling Club run team, he has helped raise more than \$10,000 for the hospital since first stepping out.

"Both my wife and I have received incredible care at Southlake, primarily within the Stronach Regional Cancer Centre, as both of us have been touched by the disease," he shared via the Southlake Foundation. "The way physicians, nurses and staff treat patients here is exceptional. Even during the hard times of COVID, they still worked hard to be compassionate and to make people like us feel comfortable."

If you want to join participants and teams like Span and the King Curling Club, the last day to register for this year's run is this Friday, April 21.

At press time this week, the Southlake Regional Health Centre Foundation reports they have nearly 900 total registered participants, significantly more than last year's outing, and fundraising stood at just over \$71,000 and counting.

"We're really inspired that the community has come together to support this event," says the Foundation's Dionne Malcolm. "Overwhelmingly we're seeing that the people that are stepping up to participate are coming from a place of this true appreciation of care close to home. It's either been experiences they've had, their kids, their spouses, their grandparents. It's this overwhelming gratitude that people feel that they want to give back. A lot of the stories we're sharing, Karel was a perfect example. He's had cancer treatment at Stronach, his wife is currently going through treatment, and they just really wanted to give back to the hospital. Overwhelmingly, it's the community coming out to support the hospital; we always say we're here when you need us, but in this instance the community is very much here for us."

Melanie Osmond of the Foundation's Events Team adds the community will be able to cheer on participants once again on Newmarket's Davis Drive as the run begins outside the Newmarket Seniors' Meeting Place, continuing out towards the hospital and under its landmark arch, back to the Meeting Place.

"We will have opening ceremonies at 8 a.m. when we announce our challenge winners to date and then we all head to the starting line, all line up, and we get our runners out first, followed by those who have some time results, followed in continuous order ending with those with strollers or walking with kids and families," says Osmond. "Down and up Davis Drive, we have entertainment along the way and we will be done and wrapped up by 11 a.m."

While this Friday may be the last day for participants to register, fundraising is open until May 4.

"If people have friends and family members inspired by what they achieved during the run, it's not too late to get those pledges in," says Malcolm. "This is our largest community fundraising event and what it means to us financially is amazing, but what it means to us in community support and how our hospital feels the support from the community is incredible. We have over 20 hospital teams registered this year, which is an astronomical number, it's amazing, and it speaks to the fact that our hospital family, physicians, staff and volunteers, feel the support from the community and want to be running alongside them."

?It is a really fun day. If you have never had an interaction with Southlake or the Southlake Foundation, it is just a really joyful, wonderful morning to be a part of. We have hospital staff who come out and literally cheer people as they pass the hospital and we just really encourage people to get involved.?

For more on this year's event, visit www.runforsouthlake.ca.