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Terry Fox Run keeps cancer research close to home in Shelburne

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For Shelburne resident Joan Wallace, the Terry Fox Run is more than an annual fundraiser. It is a reminder of how far cancer treatment has come, how much remains to be done and how deeply cancer continues to affect families in the local community.

Wallace has participated in the Terry Fox Run for roughly 30 years and spent a decade organizing Shelburne's event.

Her connection to Terry Fox began in 1980, when she and her husband discovered Fox's Marathon of Hope on television. Wallace was undergoing cancer treatment herself at the time, making Fox's journey especially personal.

?My husband and I, Bob, we followed Terry by accident,? she said. ?Bob was watching Canada AM back when Terry dipped his foot in the Atlantic to start the Marathon of Hope. Nobody had ever heard of him before, but we started following him. I was not well at the time. I had finished my chemotherapy, and was very much still living it. It was just very emotional when I think about Terry because we were both suffering at the same time.?

Decades later, Wallace has experienced cancer several times and continues to deal with the lasting effects of treatment. Her experiences have given her a firsthand understanding of why cancer research matters and why fundraising remains important.

For Wallace, the changes in cancer treatment over the decades demonstrate the value of research. Treatments and patient care have improved significantly since she was first diagnosed, giving patients possibilities that were not available generations ago.

?We have to do research, research has to be funded, we have to support it,? she said. ?I can compare treatment 47 years ago to treatment and patient care now, and how much it has changed in that period of time. Treatment is no walk in the park, but compared to 40-some years ago, it's a huge difference.?

Research can mean longer lives, better quality of life and, increasingly, the hope that a cancer diagnosis doesn't mean the end of the road.

That message is particularly important in a community like Shelburne, where personal connections are often close. Cancer is not an abstract issue for many local residents. It affects friends, parents, children, grandparents, neighbours and coworkers.

?There was a day when the doctors told you if it was cancer that you have, it was almost a death sentence,? she said. ?It's not now. 40 some years ago I was at stage four, and here I am now? I went from being a brand new mom to now, a grandma at 70. I would be very amazed if there's anybody that hasn't been touched by cancer, whether it be a friend or a family member or a parent or a child? it's something that touches us all. It's that much more important to have hope.?

Wallace also sees value in the Terry Fox Foundation's broad approach to cancer research. Funding supports work across different types of cancer, including diseases that may receive less public attention than some of the more prominent cancers. For patients and families facing those diagnoses, that research can provide a sense that their illness has not been overlooked.

The local run has also become a family tradition for Wallace. After she organized the event for 10 years, her family took over the responsibility, bringing new energy and technological skills to the fundraising effort. They have continued building community support through donations and fundraising activities, including a silent auction.

The tradition is also being passed to another generation. Wallace's grandchildren have grown up learning about Terry Fox and have

developed an interest in his story and the cause behind the run. It is important for Wallace that awareness and advocacy continue from generation to generation.

?Even my grandchildren? They have all grown up with this,? she said. ?They have a keen interest in it as well. They want to learn all about him and read about him, Terry? It's wonderful to see another generation coming along.?

For a community preparing to come together again for the Terry Fox Run, the event represents more than a day of walking or running.

It is a local expression of a national legacy ? one built on perseverance, community and the belief that continued investment in cancer research can create a better future for the people who will face the disease next.

?There's so many things going on that we can't let something like this be forgotten,? Wallace said. ?That's why I support the Terry Fox Run so much? if we didn't have research, it'd still be a death sentence when you got that diagnosis. I think there's hope.?

Shelburne's Terry Fox Run is set for Sunday, Sept. 20 at Natasha Peterson Memorial Park and Pavilion, with registration starting at 7 a.m. The run concludes at 1 p.m.