

## Sports

# Virtual race aims to help Hospice House

By ANTHONY LIFRIERI

The Visiting Nurse Service and Hospice House of Suffolk will host its 21st annual Run/Walk/Bike For the Health of It, Thursday, May 6 through Wednesday, May 12. Net proceeds from the virtual race will benefit the Visiting Nurse Center of Suffolk's Hospice House.

"We're trying to encourage people to sign up," said Susan Bruder, Hospice House's Director of Development. "It's going to be a virtual run again and it will be held during National Nurses week. This year, we're expanding it to whoever wants to run, walk or bike it, which is really exciting. We've already had quite a few people sign up to bike it."

The tradition of the run dates back to 2000, and had been held as an in-person race each year through 2019. In 2020, the pandemic forced the in-person race to be cancelled, but the Visiting Nurse Service and Hospice House of Suffolk adapted by changing it to a virtual race, which the organization is continuing this year.

"It's important for us to maintain our traditions in the community, now more than ever," Bruder said. "People trust us, not just for their clinical needs but for events like our 5k and golf classic."

Runners can take part in the virtual race any time or any place in the week-long window between May 6 and May 12. They are also free to walk, run, or bike the five-kilometer distance.

"What we say is time or distance doesn't matter, it's about coming together to support the community," Bruder said.

Net proceeds from the race will go to the Visiting Nurse Service and Hospice of Suffolk, which has a longstanding history. It was the first visiting nurse service with its founding in 1952, and in 2004 it became the first freestanding inpatient hospice house in New York State. Hospice House provides a homelike in-patient environment where families and friends can share the final days with their loved ones. Since 2004, more than 5,000 patients have been cared for at Hospice House.

"A lot of people don't know about us until they need our help or have friends who use it," Bruder said. "Having this race not only helps us close the fundraising gap as we operate on a deficit every year, but it raises awareness that we're here before there's a need for us. One thing people don't know about us is we serve people regardless of where they live, not just Suffolk County. We've had people live in Northport or Huntington and move south, but want to come back because their families are here."

Participants can register for the virtual race by visiting elitefeats.com and clicking on the "events" tab. Registration is \$25 for adults and \$10 for children. Participants can receive \$5 off each entry using the code "VIP5." Participants will also be entered into a raffle for one of 25 Amazon gift cards.

Those wishing to go the extra mile and become fundraisers can do so by visiting groupprev.com/2021vnshs. Donations of \$100 to \$5,000 will also be matched by a donor who wishes to remain anonymous.

All donors of over \$100 will receive a special holiday ornament. "Anyone who donates or fundraises will get a commemorative heart ornament they can customize with a picture and message," Bruder said. "Most people have been putting a picture and message in honor or memory of someone."

Alongside entry and a raffle ticket, each participant will receive a "swag bag" that includes running socks, a personalized bib and coupons.

"It's so cool because it comes from sponsors and supporters in our community and it's worth well over \$25," Bruder said. "Aside from the personalized bib, Geico is sending running socks, Champion Carwash [in Northport] is including a coupon, Copenhagen Bakery [in Northport] is including a coupon for a free breakfast sandwich, and Runner's Edge, which just opened a store in Huntington, is including a 20-percent off coupon."

The presenting sponsor of the race is the Charles and Helen Reichert Family Foundation. The benefit committee includes Kathleen Bilello, Kathy Martin, Rich Boziwick, Ari Scott, Mary Denning and Elaine Turley.

"The sponsors help us tremendously," Bruder said. "We know going into each race they're going to support the Hospice House, which is a huge benefit. They know we run at a deficit each year, and it's their donations in events like this that help close the gap."

Bruder said the Visiting Nurse service also appreciates the help of companies that have put together "teams" of runners for the race. Teams include Signature Premier Properties in East Northport, Personal Touch Home Care of Hauppauge, Geico and the Rotary Club of East Northport.

"We create customized e-vites for them with a registration code for their employees, and some of them even make their own shirts," Bruder said. "It's so beneficial because it helps spread the word about the event."

With the event underway, Bruder has high hopes. "We're optimistic thanks to the help of our sponsors and runners," she said. "We also hope we can get more fundraisers and runners as the week goes on."



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