

Southlake Run gains special meaning for the 'Squashed Bananas'?



By Brock Weir

Giving back to her community has been a way of life for Ilana Martin, and a trait she has tried to pass along to her two young children.

Looking for opportunities to spend time with her then three-year-old daughter, Alina, while showing her the importance of doing good for the world around them, a friend suggested the Run or Walk for Southlake and their Kids' Mini-Mile.

It was perfect, she said a way to get outside, have some fun, all while doing something productive for the community in which they live. Little did they realise when they first registered for the event that the cause would hit so close to home.

About a month [after our registration], my stepfather was completing his final shift before his retirement, says Ilana. He was literally on his way to clock out when he collapsed.

He was taken to the nearest hospital where he remained for two months before being transferred to his home hospital, Southlake.

They saved his life, she says. When he arrived at the ICU, they said they weren't sure if he was going to make it through the night. It took 364 days of using many resources, lots of support, love and care, and he went home 364 days later. Now, unfortunately, he was re-admitted in February where he has been ever since. Without them and the specialized support they offer, and without that amazing team, there is no doubt he wouldn't have had a good outcome. We just signed up to give back. We didn't know how important Southlake would become in that moment.

Although they are still young Alina is now six, and she is now part of the formidable 'Squashed Bananas' team with her three-and-a-half year-old brother, Hunter the kids are beginning to understand the importance of what they do each April, lacing up and collecting pledges for the Run or Walk for Southlake.

The run gets money for the Hospital to buy equipment for fixing people, says Alina.

We have kept it at a very basic, simplistic idea and we explained to them for the very first time we did the Run what it was for, adds Ilana. We wanted it to have meaning. That is the whole purpose of doing it to begin with. They understood that at a basic level that we're not just collecting money and the money disappears.

Having raised over \$14,000 for charities since her teens, alongside her siblings, participating in events like these, she says, makes them feel 'useful and not helpless' for the causes that are important to them. By the time her own daughter turned three, she was looking for ways to spend time with her before she started Kindergarten, while instilling this philosophy into her at the same time.

Selecting the Run or Walk for Southlake, they took to social media to collect pledges from their family and friends, collecting \$179 in that first year, well above their \$40 goal. The following year, the two siblings together upped the ante to \$375, and with just over a week before the Run gets underway at the Stronach Aurora Recreation Complex on the morning of April 26, they are sitting comfortably at \$350 with more expected to roll in.

'They get a sense of gratification giving back to the community and to the people who are around them because Southlake is such a pillar of our community that they realise it is fun to give back and Southlake will be here for us, if we ever need it. Life isn't just about what you're doing, but other people, other organizations and other causes need help also. For me, it doesn't matter what the cause, just that they find something that excites them. Right now, Southlake is a huge, important part of our lives.

'Now that we have so much gratitude for having Southlake as our local hospital, it takes on so much more meaning. When we put the word out there to family and friends and anyone we can tell that Southlake has been amazing.'

The 2015 Run or Walk for Southlake gets underway Sunday, April 26 at the Stronach Aurora Recreation Complex. Registration begins at 7.30 a.m. with the run/walk beginning at 9 a.m. To register and pledge, visit www.runforsouthlake.ca.