

Potomac ALMANAC

Raising Funds and Awareness for Autism

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Coordinator Susan Pereles
cheers the racers on at the
finish line of last year's
Autism Speaks 5K.

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Raising Funds, Awareness for Autism

Teams spark spirit at 14th Annual Autism Speaks 5K/Fun Walk on July 4.

BY SUSAN BELFORD
THE ALMANAC

Helen Keller once said, “Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much.” The Autism Speaks 5K/Fun Run is living proof that joint efforts and collaboration are powerful. More than 100 teams gather forces each year to run and walk for their brothers, sisters, nieces, nephews, children, grandchildren, friends and schoolmates — and also to support the drive to find a cure and better treatments for autism.

The teams, made up of runners and walkers of all ages represent swim clubs, schools, families, friends and companies; many participants have been touched by autism and want to help raise funds and awareness for this important cause.

One of the teams is “Richie’s Racers Team BOWA” captained by Steve Kirstein, whose son Richie is on the autistic spectrum, and “is the driving force behind our initial involvement,” said Kirstein. “Richie was diagnosed at an early age (before 1) and is now 16 and thriving in the Montgomery County autism program at Churchill High. Ritchie participates in the 1-mile walk por-



The Eldwick Sharks from Potomac are the largest swim team to compete each year. They are also the largest fundraisers and win a pizza party from Potomac Pizza every year.

tion of the event and loves his Richie’s Racers shirt and wears it with pride.”

BOWA has been a sponsor for the Autism Speaks race for 10 years and the presenting sponsor for the past four years, including this year. The team draws more than 60 volunteers who race both at the Potomac run and in Dewey, Rehobeth and Middleburg. Over the years this team has raised more than \$100,000 for Autism Speaks.

Kirstein explains what the race means to him and his team members: “This event is the most important day of my year, as autism is such a growing and concerning issue. Anything we can do to help raise awareness and acceptance within the community touches me personally and helps me feel like we are doing our part. I know my



fellow team members concur.”

The July 4 Autism Speaks 5K/Fun Walk draws 1,600 to 1,800 racers each year to the heart of Potomac — people dedicated to helping the increasing numbers of children and young adults who are on the autism spectrum.

The latest numbers recently released by the Center for Disease Control indicate that 1 in 68 children in the U.S. are on the autism spectrum. This is an increase from the 1 in 88 number released two years ago by the CDC. Children with autism continue to be overwhelmingly male. According to the new report, the CDC estimates 1 in 42 boys has autism, 4.5 times as many as girls (1 in 189).

“The new statistics raise significant concerns about access to care, because autism is a lifelong disorder and the need for services only begins at diagnosis,” said Robert Ring, chief science officer for the advocacy group Autism Speaks. “Behind these numbers are real people,” he said. “Every one of these numbers is a family that’s coming to terms with the implications of the diagnosis for the lifespan of their loved one. We need a plan to respond to these numbers, a national strategy for autism, and leadership has to come from Washington, because every congressional district is affected.”

Another team is led by Lauren Salzberg of Potomac for her son Justin. “Our team is called ‘Just for Justin,’” she said. Justin, who is 15 years old, attends the Ivymount School where he is in the multiple learning needs program.

“We have been doing this race for as long as we can remember,” Salzberg said. “It has been amazing to see this event grow and more amazing to see our son Justin grow. Now he is able to participate and last year completed the walk on his own. He knows he has autism and is proud each year to

participate. He knows this race is not only ‘Just for Justin’ but for all the other ‘Justins’ out there hoping for a cure for autism. Our team of friends and family walk and run with us year after year, and we are thankful to have such wonderful supporters.”

Salzberg’s company Potomac Lice Lady is a platinum sponsor of the race this year because “the event is so close to our hearts and Autism Speaks is such an amazing organization.

“We went through some very trying times, as most families living with a child with autism do. You take each day as it comes and live in the moment. You learn to set realistic yet hopeful goals and learn that sometimes you have to take a few steps backwards to get major steps ahead. It has not always been the easiest road for our family, but with love, support and guidance, especially from wonderful groups and people like those at Autism Speaks, success can be made. Early intervention is key and knowledge is golden. The more you can

SEE TEAMS SPARK, PAGE 9



PHOTO BY MARY KIMM/THE ALMANAC

Primary Election Day

Tuesday, June 24 was Primary Election Day in Montgomery County, with many contested races for the Democratic nominations, including Governor, Attorney General, General Assembly, Sheriff, County Council and others. At the River Falls precinct in Potomac, 115 voters had voted by 10 a.m. At 1:45 p.m. Marjorie Roher of the Montgomery County Board of Elections indicated that the voter turnout for the Montgomery County Primary Election “will be moderate.” Voting results can be found at the board’s website: www.777vote.org/electionresults/elec_results.html.



Race Coordinator Susan Pereles and volunteer Paul Equale at the 2011 Autism Speaks 5K and Fun Run.

Teams Spark Spirit at Autism Speaks 5K/Fun Walk

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learn, the more you can do and achieve for your child.”

Wendy Kuhn and her family had participated on their church’s team for a number of years and enjoyed it because it was an athletic event they could do together while at the same time helping a good cause. However, in 2010 when she became PTA president at Carderock Springs Elementary, the school had just moved into their newly renovated school which included three specially equipped classrooms for students with autism.

“The 12 children with autism were non-verbal and there was little opportunity to integrate the students with the mainstream student body,” Kuhn said. “Our principal and school counselor introduced a Best Buddies program whereby kids in grades 3-5 could spend their recess every other week serving as a buddy to kids in the autism program. One of the ways we also offered support was to participate in the Autism Speaks 5K. Our team, ‘Carderock Best Buddies,’ raises over \$1,500 every year and we always have representation on race day from students and parents and staff. One year, one of the boys with autism wasn’t feeling well, so my son (one of his best buddies) pulled him along the 1-mile walking course in a red wagon. They had a great time.”

“My family and I continue to participate and look forward to the event every summer. I have made some special friendships and have selfishly benefited from my involvement with our team and our school program. I draw strength and courage from the kids and caregivers and parents whose everyday lives are affected by autism. I am hopeful that our medical professionals will soon find more answers for these families. The Autism Speaks 5K is appropri-



BOWA’s Richie’s Racers Team supports the Autism Speaks 5K Run /1-Mile Walk in Potomac on July 4 each year. BOWA, a residential design and construction firm, is the presenting sponsor of the race. See www.BOWA.com.

ately held on July 4 as we celebrate our freedom and independence and stand united in our desire to help give autism some optimism.”

The coordinator of the Potomac Autism Speaks 5K/Fun Walk, Susan Pereles, became involved 14 years ago when her nephew was diagnosed with autism. She is dedicated to making this race one of the most successful Autism Speaks events in the U.S. “I am pleased that so many runners return year after year to our event and that we have dedicated teams who bring such spirit to our race,” she said. “We have participants from across the U.S. — and now with our Virtual 5K, you can register and support the cause from the comfort of your home, from your vacation spot, or through a bike ride, a mountain climb or a walk on the beach. Last year people registered from London, Afghanistan, Kosovo and Hawaii. You can sleep on your



Race Coordinator Susan Pereles and U.S. Rep. Chris Van Hollen with 5K racers.

couch or run on a treadmill. Whatever you do, you will be helping our cause.”

Plan to participate in the July 4 Autism Speaks 5K/Fun Walk on July 4 – either in Potomac or virtually. The race will begin at the Potomac Public Library, 10101 Glenolden Drive in Potomac at

7:30 a.m. with a pre-warm-up and the road race begins at 8 a.m. The 1-mile walk will begin at 8:05. Register at autismspeaks.org/AutismSpeaks5K. Adults are \$35 (\$40 on July 4) and children 14 and under are \$15. For more information or to donate, visit the website.

LET’S TALK Real Estate



by Michael Matese

Don’t Let These Three Facts Slip Through the Cracks!

Buying a new home often involves facing a torrent of new information, from convoluted rates and percentages, to forewarnings, suggestions, tips, advisements, and downright imploration. Unfortunately, few home buyers ever feel truly prepared to make the big decision, and so it becomes incredibly important to find a broker or agent you can truly trust while conducting as much research as possible on your own. All too often, despite this safety net of expert advice and self-directed study, some things still go unnoticed. Here is a brief list of three facts that routinely go unmentioned, undiscovered, and undisclosed.

Knowledge is Power

• **Fact #1: Don’t count yourself out until you gather all the information.**

While the traditional notion behind previous foreclosure would contend that you are financially sunk and therefore ineligible from qualifying for a loan to become a home-owner, in actuality this circumstance is less dire than typically assumed. While it is true that foreclosure remains on your credit rating for up to seven years, large scale government-backed lenders such as Freddie Mac and Fannie Mae have begun imposing just three-year penalties for foreclosure. Though you may be required to pay a higher down payment or pay slightly higher interest rates, you aren’t disqualified from the dream of home ownership as easily as you may assume.

• **Fact #2: Be sure to check into the housing codes and regulations pertaining to properties you are interested in.**

Prospective buyers would do well to diligently ensure that recent renovations, additions, and improvements were conducted in conjunction with guidelines set by now-starving city planning departments. If you purchase a home with violations, you may be saddled with the responsibility of bringing them to code.

• **Fact #3: Hire your own people.** It is important not to expose yourself to liability by accepting the seller’s offer to use their agent, appraiser, or inspector. These professionals owe an allegiance to the person paying for their service, so it’s best to hire your own team of licensed home specialists.

For professional advice on all aspects of buying and selling real estate, call:

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301-806-6829**

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Be Part of The Pet Connection in July

Send Your Photos & Stories Now to almanac@connectionnewspapers.com or complete our online form at potomacalmanac.com

Be sure to include your name, address and phone number, and identify all people and pets in photos. Submission deadline is July 17.

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