



STACEY LAUREN-KENNEDY/GAZETTE PHOTOGRAPHER

Melissa Rosowsky, 8, of Niskayuna, climbs a cherry tree during the Cherry Blossom 5K Race at the Congregation Gates of Heaven in Niskayuna. See a photo gallery at dailygazette.com.

SCHENECTADY

Blossoms star at benefit race, walk

Funds raised go to MDA/ALS Clinic

BY KELLY DE LA ROCHA
Gazette Reporter

They came to run or walk, but many participants in Sunday's Cherry Blossom 5K Race and 2K Wellness Walk for ALS couldn't help but first linger among the cherry trees that bejewel the lawn at Congregation Gates of Heaven.

A large crowd of athletes and spectators milled around the synagogue Sunday morning, taking in the spring sights and inhaling the aroma of barbecued chicken, which was being grilled over hot coals in the parking lot.

The Cherry Blossom race, now in its fifth year, is held in memory of Lewis Golub, a Congregation Gates of Heaven member who suffered with ALS, a progressive, degenerative nerve disease.

Proceeds from the event benefit

St. Peter's Health Partners' ALS Regional Center/Lewis Golub MDA/ALS Clinic.

Lauren Cosamano, 34, of Scotia, was running in honor of her father, Scott VanBuskirk, who has had ALS for 16 years. She and her team of three friends had blue shirts made for the event that said, "All the ladies love Scott" on the back.

"We surprised him today with our shirts. He thought he was just coming for a regular race," said Cosamano, whose father was there to cheer on the team.

Janet Brownell of Niskayuna wore red felt hearts pinned to her black fleece jacket.

"In memory of Ed," one said. "We miss you, Ed," read the other.

Brownell, who was participating in the wellness walk, spoke of her deceased friend with a sad

smile.

"He was diagnosed at 39 and he died two years later. His mind was really sharp all the way till the end, so he knew, every step of his decline, he knew exactly what was going on."

Sunday's walk drew about 100 participants and the run, about 400 — an all-time record, according to race director Tim Fecura, who said attendance had just about tripled from last year.

He said he was hopeful the event would raise \$7,000 — considerably more than the \$2,500 it raised last year.

The funds will help support programs at the ALS Clinic.

"Most of our patients, their services are provided free of charge or at very little cost," noted Melissa Morrison, an employee at the clinic.

Runner Chris Cueman of Niskayuna was rivaling the cher-

ry blossoms for showiness in his flashy silver running shorts, reserved exclusively for races.

"That's the only time I wear them because I wouldn't be allowed out of the house otherwise," the 38-year-old joked.

He was happy to be out running on a warm, sunny day.

"You get out and see your neighbors and everyone who you haven't seen all winter, and it's like everyone comes out of hibernation," he said.

Rob Curto, 32, of Niskayuna, said he was there to try to run off the 20 pounds of sympathy weight he gained when his wife was pregnant.

"It helps, running for a cause every weekend," he said. "It gets you out of bed on the weekend."

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