

Running for Zack -- no matter what

Sun, The (Lowell, MA) - Wednesday, August 25, 2010

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HUDSON, N.H. -- Against his doctor's advice, Selectman Roger Coutu plans to enter -- and complete -- the "Zack Attack 5K" road race Friday, to help raise money for the stadium to be named after 11-year-old Zachary **Tompkins** . On all fours, if necessary.

"I'm going to do it, even if I have to crawl across the finish line," said Coutu, who had intestinal surgery in March and has a pinched nerve in his right leg.

According to the event's coordinators, as of yesterday nearly 200 entrants had pre-registered to run, walk or bicycle the 3.5-mile course that will begin and end at Alvirne High School. (More participants are expected to sign up an hour before the race, which steps off at 6:30 p.m.)

In between the start and finish lines, the course includes a very steep incline on Greeley Street that the 67-year-old Coutu foresaw as presenting the biggest obstacle to his twin goals of finishing the race -- and avoiding the need for medical aid. Besides having a stubborn determination to fulfill a commitment he made to his running sponsors, Coutu has another source of inspiration for wanting to complete the course.

"Originally, I had no intention of entering until I had a conversation with Necole a few months back, and she said that if I ran, she'd run with me," recalled Coutu. "How do you say no to Zack's mom?"

Necole **Tompkins** , a veteran of numerous road races, had been in the habit of running regularly, until her son died at home in his sleep March 8 of unknown causes. She plans to join Coutu on the 5K course, she confirmed yesterday.

"Zachary and I had a thing about running," said Necole. "Zach was very family-oriented and it was a big thing for him that, anytime I did a race, he'd cancel any plans he might have had to (in order) to be there at the finish line, holding a slice of pizza, and flowers for me."

Necole's friend and fellow 5K event coordinator, Gayleen Silva of Dracut, is convinced that Zach's presence will be felt by his mom, dad and two brothers -- and all other participants on Friday.

"It's going to be a great night, great weather, and Zach will be there, smiling down on all of us. I'm sure of it," said Silva.

So far, in five short months of fundraising, Silva said the community has banded together like never before to raise more than \$100,000 to make Zach's dream of having a stadium named after him a reality.

"What Necole and Mike and the many volunteers have done so far -- it's amazing," said Silva. "The stadium is going to be beautiful. Yes, it's a huge undertaking, but Necole is very

determined. It keeps her going."

Despite this being a very busy time of year, Necole noted, with vacations ending, school starting and Zach's former Hudson-Litchfield Bears football teammates practicing, "that people are making time and finding it in their hearts to do this, it's amazing to me," said Necole. "We couldn't do this without everyone pulling together. It continues to inspire me, and gives me a reason to pull myself out of bed every morning."

To pre-register for the Zack Attack 5K using PayPal, go to: www.zacharytompkins.org/ to sponsor Roger Coutu (or wish him farewell), call 603- 594-0856.