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Speck Memorial 5K to benefit Ronald McDonald House

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Will Speck served as an advocate for the elderly during the nearly three decades that he worked for the state Department of Elderly Affairs.

He established the CLCF track and cross country programs in his hometown of Cranston.

And in the years before Speck died unexpectedly at the age of 52 following an afternoon run, he was helping to resurrect the running programs at Bay View Academy.

“He recruited every single student he met and turned each of them into runners, joggers and walkers,” said his daughter, Juliette Speck de Roxas. “As ” he always said, ‘It’s not how fast you go, it’s just important to go.’”

De Roxas established a road race in his memory shortly after his death in 2003. For the last seven years, the event has helped fund scholarships, and this year it will benefit Providence’s Ronald McDonald House, which provides a home away from home for families with children at area hospitals.

When de Roxas, a 1995 graduate of Cranston East, heard that a number of athletic programs, including boys and girls indoor track, are being cut from the budget for the upcoming school year, she decided that this year’s Will Speck Memorial Race should jump in and lend a hand.

For every runner that a member of the Cranston East and Cranston West track teams pre-register for Sunday’s 5K, the road race will donate \$25 to that team. And for every friend or family member that competes on behalf of a Thunderbolt or Falcons runner, an additional \$25 — with a cap of \$4,000 — will be donated to their programs.

The seventh annual Will Speck Memorial Race will include a 5K run and walk, beginning at 9:30 a.m. at the Cranston West track, at 80 Metropolitan Ave. The 3.1-miler will start beside the gymnasium and travel through the surrounding neighborhood and Meshanticut Park, circling Meshanticut Lake, before a final sprint on the track.

Cash prizes, as well as gift certificates donated by local businesses, will be awarded to top individual and team finishers. Post-race food and refreshments will be provided by McDonald's of Reservoir Avenue and Johnson & Wales University.

There also will be a series of free kids races at 8:45 a.m.

The event will also once again include a Sneaker Drop, where race entrants can donate their used running shoes, which will then be given to youngsters around the state who cannot afford them. For more information, go to www.willspeckmemorial.org or e-mail willspeckmemorial@hotmail.com.