

Organ Donor 5K Honors Volunteer

Group promoting Jewish organ donation names annual race for supporter who died of transplant complications.

BY STEVE LIPMAN | June 6, 2018, 11:35 am |

During the four recent years that former Queens resident Meredith Farrell spent in Pittsburgh waiting for a lung transplant, she became an active supporter of the Halachic Organ Donor Society (HODS).

She participated in the organization's annual fundraising 5-kilometer race here as a "virtual runner," gathering sponsors for the event she watched through real-time updates on her laptop from her hospital bed or apartment. And she encouraged friends to also contribute to HODS, which educates the public about the need for members of the observant Jewish community to become organ donors.

This year the 5K race will bear the name of Ms. Farrell, who died on April 24, at 40, from complications of her long-awaited transplant.

At the race on Sunday, June 10 at 10 a.m., in Brooklyn's Marine Park, about a half-dozen friends of hers will participate as Team Meredith, and others will donate in her memory.

"She was a very special person" who reached out to HODS although she did not personally benefit from its advocacy activities, said Robby Berman, a Jerusalem-based Long Island native who formed HODS (hods.org) 16 years ago.

"She felt strongly about their [HODS] mission," said her brother Scott, who lives in North Woodmere, L.I.

While many runners and walkers in the seventh annual race, which earlier was held in Central Park, take part in honor or memory of individuals who need an organ transplant, the friends of Ms. Farrell are the only ones who have officially formed such a team named for someone, Berman said.

Supporters of Ms. Farrell, a onetime art therapist and member of the Modern Orthodox community in Kew Gardens Hills, have raised a total of about \$35,000 over the years, he said.

The upcoming Meredith Farrell 5K race will include a few brief speeches by people who knew her well.

The race is the main fundraising event for HODS, an independent organization that has recruited several prominent Orthodox rabbis who have declared that organ donation is not a violation of Jewish law.

The organization's annual budget is \$500,000.

For the first time, HODS will this year sponsor a similar 5K race in Jerusalem, on Friday, June 8. And the New York City race will for the first time include a "Crutch Walk" — the organization will provide 30 sets of crutches for able-bodied participants who wish to show solidarity with Sara Bezalely, a Great Neck resident who lost a leg to complications from swine flu.

Any participant in the race who raises more than \$5,000 in sponsorships will receive a free round-trip ticket to Israel, a meeting there with an Israeli "whose life was saved by HODS," and a meeting with the surgeon who performed the transplant operation, a HODS brochure states.

Ms. Farrell's goal, once she regained her health, was to take part in the 5K race, physically, not virtually, said her brother. "She would have loved to do it," he said.

Tsippa Ackerman Atkin, a Kew Gardens Hills resident who was a close friend of Ms. Farrell, serves as captain of Team Meredith; she said she plans to take part again this year. Her goal each year is \$5,000. "I'm going to raise it to \$10,000."

Atkin said her friend will watch the race this year, from a higher place. "She's still a virtual runner."

For information: race@hods.org; friendsofmeredith.wordpress.com; hods5krace.rallybound.org/Meredith; (212) 213-5087.