

Sharsheret hopes race will raise awareness

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Sharsheret — a Teaneck-based organization that helps those affected by breast cancer — is seeking to raise both funds and awareness by sponsoring a team of local athletes in the Nautica/NYC Triathlon on July 18.

Donations have already eclipsed the organization's goal, said Ellen Kleinhaus, Sharsheret's project manager, and have so far surged beyond \$41,000. The organization set up Webpages for the team members through which each athlete can broadcast a personal message and donations can be electronically processed.

"I live in Englewood and the community here is extremely generous when it comes to these sorts of things," Chani Teigman, a member of Team Sharsheret, told The Jewish Standard. "It has not been difficult at all."

In addition to Teigman, Team Sharsheret includes Cheryl Lasher and Joseph Lerner of Englewood, Gila Leiter of Teaneck, and Linda Gerstel of New York City.

Members of the team came up with various methods to solicit donations. Lerner sent out a mass e-mail message explaining that although one in 345 women in the general public is a carrier of the breast cancer gene known as BRCA, one in 40 Ashkenazi women carries the gene. Furthermore, he noted that carriers have an 80 percent chance of developing breast cancer.

Since its founding in 2001, Sharsheret has responded to more than 19,000 breast cancer inquiries, involved more than 1,000 peer supporters, and presented more than 200 educational programs nationwide.

"Sharsheret is either known to people and high up in their priorities or people appreciate it significantly when they hear the story," Lerner told the Standard. "Sharsheret's value reaches beyond people who have breast cancer. It reaches out to people at risk."

Although this is the first year Sharsheret has sponsored a team in the NYC Triathlon, the organization, through a partnership with Komen for the Cure, has sponsored teams for six years in New York City's Race 4 the Cure.

Several months ago, a member of Full Throttle Endurance, a high-intensity multi-sport training program run out of Chelsea Peers, contacted the founder of Sharsheret, Rochelle Shoretz, suggesting that Sharsheret participate in the triathlon. Shoretz herself is a survivor of breast cancer.

In addition, the FTE member arranged for the group's founder, Scott Berlinger, to meet with Team Sharsheret and provide tips for race day, including how to enter the water, techniques for transition, and how to be time-efficient.

Team Sharsheret also met with nutritionist Julie Kramer, who spoke to the team about hydration and proper dieting.

The athletes will swim for one mile in the Hudson, followed by a 25-mile bike ride through the Bronx, and conclude with a 6.2-mile run in Central Park.

Members of the team are primarily responsible for arranging their own physical training.

"This has been a bit of a challenge, having four kids and trying to fit in the full training," said Leiter, who has been on the medical advisory board of Sharsheret since its inception. "I'm definitely more comfortable doing the medical conferences than the triathlon," Leiter added half-jokingly.

Despite that, she said, "It's definitely fun to have a goal and have something worthwhile to strive for. I think I might end up doing another triathlon."

John Korff, chief organizer of the Nautica/NYC Triathlon, spoke excitedly about Team Sharsheret.

"There's only one other Jewish charity in the race and they help the victims of terror in Israel by helping to pay for prosthetic body parts," he said.

Sharsheret struck particularly close to home for Korff, whose mother-in-law died of breast cancer.

"I think this will be great for [Sharsheret]," he said. "They get tons of exposure and can raise a lot of money for a very good cause."

Korff told the Standard how his event specifically accommodates the 300 or so Orthodox Jews in the race of about 3,000.

"Athletes are supposed to check their bikes in on Saturday, but we let [Orthodox Jews] come Saturday night to drop their bikes off. Most race organizers can't be bothered, but we can be bothered."

The NYC Triathlon has had a history of accommodating Orthodox Jews, Korff said. A religious triathlon group named TriChai often participates in local races.

"Welcome to the melting pot of America," Korff said.

Sharsheret will also sponsor a team in the ING NYC Marathon on Nov. 7.

"We look at the triathlon as a prototype before we expand not only in New Jersey and New York," Kleinhaus said, "but throughout the country."