

HELPING HANDS

Run, walk, skip or hop

4/17/20

Virtual 5K race against hunger to benefit CT Food Bank

By Lisa Reisman

John Bysiewicz was on a run near his Stony Creek home on the balmy afternoon of Thursday, March 12 when the idea for a virtual Race Against Hunger came to him.

By then, a directive from Gov. Ned Lamont had come down, limiting gatherings to no more than 50 people, and effec-

tively canceling the slate of road races that JB Sports, Bysiewicz's events management company, had scheduled throughout the spring.

"We had to do something, especially for people who were going to need help meeting their basic needs," Bysiewicz said, who's organized races benefiting the Connecticut Food Bank in the

past.

After a series of conference calls over the next few days, JB Sports and CT Food Bank had an agreement in place. Soon Stop & Shop signed on as a title sponsor for the event.

Just over a week after Bysiewicz's early-spring run, the CT Food Bank Race Against Hunger

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August Damsky, 4, and Robin Damsky, 2, among the participants lacing up for the first annual virtual 5K CT Food Bank Race against Hunger.

Contributed photo



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RACE

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Virtual 5K had gone live online, with roughly 300 participants.

The way it works is simple. Sometime between Monday, April 13 and Saturday, April 19, participants are asked to run or walk 5 kilometers, or 3.1 miles, at a location of their choosing.

The race organizers are asking participants to follow current health recommendations, and avoid running or walking closer than at least six feet from anyone.

Registration, with a \$20 entry fee, is at jbsports.com/race-against-hunger. Participants may register anytime before April 19.

"You can do it inside or outside, you can walk or run, just record the time on your Fitbit, or your phone, and send it in, and we'll put the results in a database," Bysiewicz said.

The event "couldn't have come at a more perfect time," said Paul Shipman, senior director of Marketing, Communication and Government Relations for CT Food Bank, which "distributes food through a network of 600 [soup kitchens, shelters, food pantries, and day programs] in Fairfield, Litchfield, Middlesex, New Haven, New London, and Windham counties."

In view of the social distancing challenges, "we made the difficult decision to cancel CFB's Walk Against Hunger," held annually in May, "a cornerstone event for us in terms of visibility and support," Shipman said.

Without that boost, the virtual Race Against Hunger "is now more vital than ever," he said, particularly with the seemingly perfect storm the CT Food Bank is currently facing.

More than half of the 302,000 Connecticut residents filing for unemployment benefits are still waiting for their claims to be processed, as reported by the state Department of Labor on April 9. There's also a rising need to have food on hand to sustain households that may need to shelter in place for extended periods.

As a result of those two factors, "we're seeing the

need increase at every location," Shipman said.

Add to that the drop in donations from the food industry. Grocery stores, which ordinarily share unsold inventory that is approaching its best-by date, have "less surplus, with customers buying far more groceries than usual."

Because there is less donated food, Shipman said, "we're having to spend money to buy food in a way we've never had to do before."

The financial support afforded by the virtual Race Against Hunger is not just "crucial," as he put it. With everyone who registers and participates wearing a CT Food Bank Race Against Hunger 2020 racing bib, it's also "a wonderful way of perpetuating the tradition of community visibility."

"Those bibs will go a long way in saying, 'hey, I'm helping Connecticut Food Bank, and you can too,' and we're really excited about that," Shipman said, adding that those unable to participate might consider supporting someone else's effort or making a donation to the CT Food Bank at ctfoodbank.org.

Bysiewicz noted that many participants are opting to make donations that more than double the \$20 entry fee.

"Even though the situation may be bad for many, it's worse for many more, and I think people realize that," he said.

"This event is an opportunity not only to participate but to do some good for a worthy organization that is very much in need of support right now."

► To sign up for the CT Food Bank Race Against Hunger Virtual 5K, visit jbsports.com/race-against-hunger.

► To donate to the CT Food Bank, visit ctfoodbank.org/donate/ways-to-give/donate-funds.

► Note: Volunteers are urgently needed to sort and repack food into manageable size for delivery to member programs and mobile pantries at the CT Food Bank. Safe practices are strictly followed for cleaning, glove and mask wearing, and limiting contact between persons. Those interested should visit ctfoodbank.org and click on volunteer.