



SUN-TRIBUNE FILE PHOTO

Cancer survivor Sharon Summerhayes, left, and friend Suzette Holman were members of the first edition of the team Sharon the Love during the Stouffville Terry Fox Run in 2008. The team, including Health Minister Jane Philpott, will take part again Sunday.

Cancer survivor: 'Terry Fox Run helped saved my life'

BY ALI RAZA
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Longtime Stouffville resident Summerhayes was diagnosed with a rare form of nasal cancer in October 2007, shortly after she participated in her first Terry Fox Run.

The cancer affected the roof of her mouth and her nasal cavity. Summerhayes received 35 rounds of radiation and two rounds of chemotherapy after doctors said, "It's going to be one of the toughest treatments they do for cancer," she explained.

Unable to chew food for months, Summerhayes was fed directly to her stomach via a feeding tube. In the midst of all the pain, residents in the community – some friends and some strangers – worked together, offered relief and helped Summerhayes through her uphill recovery.

"It was unbelievable," she said. "The support we got, people pulled together, they organized, all the food, all the driving for the kids, everything, it was incredible."

Summerhayes was treated at Princess Margaret Cancer Centre in Toronto. Her friends drove her to treatments, helped with her children and her home. One of her close friends even held a fundraiser at their church, Christ Church Stouffville.

A hairstylist by profession, Summerhayes had to put her home salon business on hold while she fought cancer.

Exactly one year after she was diagnosed, in October 2008, Summerhayes was cancer-free and open for business.

Summerhayes emotionally explained specifically how her good friend, Beate Barnett, helped her through her fight.

"She was just a woman from the town I knew socially," Summerhayes said. "She showed up when she found out I was sick and said to me, 'I'm not leaving till you're well' and came to my home every day for four months, rain or snow — she doesn't even drive."

"She looked after me, every single morning, she got me out of bed, got me walking, I couldn't have done it without her," she added.

Barnett says she was once Summerhayes' neighbour until they lost touch. The Terry Fox Run brought them together and that was when she learned of her old friend's illness.

"It was a very scary time in her life," Barnett said. "I felt better doing something than doing nothing. I thought somebody should be there for Sharon, because going

through radiation treatments is certainly not an easy walk, so I offered that I would become kind of her caretaker."

As a committee member for the Stouffville Terry Fox Run for 15 years, Barnett told Summerhayes that she had to submit a team to the next run. Summerhayes enthusiastically agreed.

Today, from the people who supported her to those who learned of her battle, team "Sharon the Love" now has 35 members.

"We're pretty involved in it, it's amazing," Summerhayes said. "I like to say to people that it's fundraisers like this that saved my life."

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The team offers T-shirts to participants, including Markham-Stouffville MP and federal Health Minister Jane Philpott – also one of Summerhayes' clients – who told her she'd wear the team shirt for the run.

Stouffville is one of Canada's top fundraising towns for the Terry Fox Run, entering its 36th year with 1,500 participants expected.

Summerhayes wanted to highlight the help she received from her husband, Graham, and her friends, Irish Gregory, Jacqueline Foley and Vince Brewerton, who helped organize food and taking care of the home.

Her former babysitter, Leah Percy, "came three nights a week to put my kids to bed, that was incredible for us," Summerhayes said.

Summerhayes has participated in the Terry Fox Run every single year since her diagnosis in 2007. Her health is well and she remains active.

"I have residual effects, but you wouldn't know it to look at me," she said. "I'm very, very fortunate; I came out with just small side effects."

"I can eat again and that was a big thing," she added.

The Stouffville Terry Fox Run leaves Latcham Hall in Stouffville Memorial Park Sunday at 1 p.m. Registration begins at noon. You can sign up online at terryfox.ca

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