

Paying tribute and giving thanks

Hospice walk draws hundreds 11:45 PM, Apr. 17, 2011

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Walkers round a turn in the Hospice Walk for Dignity on Saturday at Willow Creek Park in Iowa City. Organizers were expecting about 1,300 participants to walk the 1-mile or 3-mile courses. Matthew Holst / Iowa City Press-Citizen

For Doug Alberhasky and his family, Sunday's Hospice Walk for Dignity was about paying tribute to his grandfather and grandmother, as well as thanking the workers who cared for the couple in their final days.

About 55 members of the Alberhasky clan and their friends wore shirts reading "In heaven there is now beer" -- a nod to John and Erma Alberhasky's legacy as the founders of John's Grocery -- during the 12th annual charity walk for Iowa City Hospice.

"A lot of times you don't know about Hospice until you need it," Doug Alberhasky said. "It's our family's chance to give back."

Organizers were expecting about 1,300 participants to walk the 1-mile or 3-mile courses through Willow Creek Park, with the goal of raising \$130,000 for Iowa City Hospice, the nonprofit organization that offers care to patients and families during the dying process regardless of their insurance coverage.

The Alberhaskys served as the honorary family for the event, which traditionally features dozens of teams walking in memory of loved ones who have benefited from Hospice's services. John died on Oct. 14, 2010, at age 92, and Erma died on Nov. 8, 2010, at age 88. Both received Hospice care before their death.

"I know personally that our family is deeply thankful for the support Hospice provided our family," John and Erma's son, Tim Alberhasky, told the crowd before the start of the walk.

Joanne Moore of Iowa City, a volunteer in the Iowa City Hospice office, was walking in memory of her husband Jerry, who died in 2008. Hospice helped Moore's family with meals and other day-to-day tasks in Jerry's final days, she said. "They give so much to families in their time of need," Moore said.

Margarita Ordenana of Iowa City walked with son Luis and daughter Nancy to honor several family members who have died and received Hospice care. "We thought it was a good family bonding experience, and something all three of us could do together," said Luis Ordenana, 23.

Before the walk, Ivana Takacova of Iowa City wrote the name of her late friend, Tom Lacey, on a ribbon that she tied to a wreath on display. "It's to honor his memory and to express my gratitude for the wonderful services he received," Takacova said.

Maggie Elliott, Iowa City Hospice's executive director, was grateful for sunny weather and another large turnout -- although walkers have proven hardy no matter how inclement the weather over the years, she said. "It's just more fun when the sun's out," Elliott said.