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ALS support group gets \$156G donation

SHOPRITES: Raised money from customer contributions

SUPPORT GROUP: Attends to the needs of patients with ALS

BY JIM MCCONVILLE, KEYPORT BUREAU

ABERDEEN — It starts in the extremities.

Then, it gradually weakens and eventually destroys your motor coordination, running from your brain down through your spinal cord.

In the last stages, you cannot move; you have essentially become a lucid mind trapped in a broken-down body.

Lou Gehrig's disease

It is ALS, or amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, commonly called Lou Gehrig's disease after the Yankees baseball great who succumbed to ALS in 1941.

Until recently, ALS victims in central New Jersey had no genuine group to turn to for support and guidance. That changed in June 2006, when Joan Dancy of Middletown died of ALS at age 54.

Borne out of her struggles with ALS, Dancy nurtured a dream: to create a local support group to help others cope with this debilitating disease.

"Joan Dancy's last wishes were that her fiance, Terry Magovern, use his influence to try to help other people who had the same problem that she did," said Richard Saker, president and CEO of Saker ShopRite Inc., and friend of Dancy and Magovern.

A dream is realized

Dancy's dream became reality when Magovern, 60, became founder and president of the Joan Dancy & PALS Support Group.

Meanwhile, Saker, 56, has raised more than \$500,000 for the support group in the past two years, holding special events and orchestrating semi-annual fundraisers at his 27 stores.



Richard Saker (left), president and CEO of Saker ShopRite Inc., greets Joan Hall and her husband Jim (right) of Aberdeen, support group members, after presenting a check for \$156,000 to Joan Dancy & PALS Support Group President Sean Magovern. Looking on is Kathy Valentino, a social worker with the group.

STAFF PHOTO: BOB BIELK

On Friday, a \$156,000 check was presented to the Dancy support group at the ShopRite here. The money is from customer contributions over the past month to the Saker ShopRites Strike Out ALS fundraiser, held at 27 stores in central New Jersey. Store customers donate \$1. Four-dollar donations were matched by the store.

“We couldn’t do this without Richard and (his wife) Laura Saker,” said Sean Magovern, current president of the support group.

The group attends to the needs of roughly 50 ALS patients at any given time, Magovern said.

Sean Magovern, 43, of Avon took up the ALS support group mantle from his father, Terry Magovern, who died of a sudden heart attack on July 30.

A well-known figure on the Jersey Shore music scene, Terry Magovern worked as Bruce Springsteen’s personal assistant for the past 30 years.

The Dancy fund’s next fundraising activity will be at noon Feb. 9, when the group will hold “Jump in and Feel the Love, a Valentine Plunge for ALS” at Manasquan Beach.

The event will feature an ocean plunge and an after-plunge party at O’Neill’s Bar, Grill & Guesthouse. All donations will benefit local Monmouth and Ocean county residents and their families suffering from ALS.

“The money that we are raising is going directly to the patients and not research,” Saker said.