

WINNING STRATEGIES

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Loss brings Gain

By Tracy A. Politowicz, Managing Editor

SPRINGFIELD, NJ - People lose weight for various reasons: to be healthier, to be more attractive, maybe even to fit into clothes from their younger years. Springfield resident Ted Stampoulos is losing weight for charity.

At the end of May, he began a diet and exercise program to lose at least 22 pounds from his 243-pound frame. He is requesting pledges for each pound that he loses.

His loss will be the gain of Opportunity Project, a nonprofit organization in Millburn that “empowers people with brain injuries.”

“My goal is to raise \$10,000,” said Stampoulos. “We’ll probably go over that.”

Because Stampoulos’ older sister Rosanne is a survivor of brain cancer, he feels a personal attachment to the organization.

Six years ago, after fainting at a seminar in Europe, Rosanne was diagnosed with glioblastoma multiforme, a malignant tumor that grows rapidly and invades nearby tissue. Her doctor gave her 18 months to live.

Stampoulos recalls how shocked he was at the diagnosis. “We never had any major sickness in my family,” he said. “She was perfectly healthy, enjoying life. She didn’t smoke or drink. She didn’t have headaches.”

On the other hand, Stampoulos, 45, is a self-described “foodie.”

“That’s why I own three restaurants,” said Stampoulos, referring to Martini Bistro & Bar, and Pizzeta, side-by-side in Millburn, and Pizzeta Enoteca in Livingston.

While he participated in football and track in high school, he hasn’t worked out much since then.

So, his friend, Dave D’Addio, a personal trainer, suggested he lose weight.

“He forced it a little bit,” said Stampoulos. “Then he suggested I do it for something (a reason).”

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A customer told him about Opportunity Project, which allows people with brain injuries to participate in a work-oriented environment to develop practical, functional community and work living skills.

“When you get a brain injury, people shut the door on you,” said Stampoulos.
“Opportunity Project helps people get back to work.”

When he realized “there wasn’t enough awareness of the organization,” it became the perfect benefactor of his weight loss pledges. D’Addio is helping his friend by donating four weekly personal training sessions.

“The first day I got to his house, I knew I was in trouble,” said D’Addio. “He was wearing a pair of sneakers that were about 10 years old. He also had on his gold (jewelry), a watch and his cell phone.”

Stampoulos said losing weight has been harder than he thought it would be.

“It’s difficult when you own three restaurants,” said Stampoulos. “There’s always an urge to taste something.”

He noted that people assume he can order whatever healthy fare he wants from his restaurant. That may be true, but “when I want to eat, normal people eat, so I am busy (working).”

Before he started his diet, Stampoulos bought two extra large coffees with half-and-half at Dunkin’ Donuts every morning. He would return two or three times a day for his “vice.”

He would also go into Pizzeta every day and say, “Louie, give me a slice.” And his employee would oblige with a slice of pepperoni pizza.

Now he drinks his coffee with skim milk, and on a less frequent basis. Once in a while he still enjoys pizza, but knows not to overindulge.

“I went to my niece’s graduation recently and there were these beautiful hot dogs on the grill,” said Stampoulos with a laugh. “If you cheat this week, you don’t cheat next week. You still have to enjoy food.”

He acknowledges that there are times when he wants to call D'Addio and cancel a workout session. "But I don't want to embarrass myself and he's donating his time (for me)," said Stampoulos.

Having already lost 18 pounds, he has more energy than he used to and "takes my shirt off at the beach."

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The last day of Stampoulos' "challenge" is Aug. 31, when his final weigh-in will be celebrated at Martini Bistro.

He intends to try to continue his new healthy regiment after Aug. 31. "I need to work another 10 years to pay for college," said Stampoulos. He has a 3½-year-old and a second child due next month.

"To this point, he's done well," said D'Addio. "The program is nothing drastic. He's not measuring food and I gave him workouts he can do on his own."

After her diagnosis, Rosanne underwent surgery and a couple of rounds of chemotherapy. She has been in a "safe zone" the past two years, said Stampoulos, but he realizes the battle may not be over.

"The cancer is like a weed in the grass. You pull it out, but it will keep coming back," said Stampoulos.

Rosanne, who will turn 51 next week, experiences short-term memory loss, but "could be a role model" for cancer patients, said Stampoulos.

"She wants to go out and help people, and she doesn't feel sorry for herself," he said.

To make a pledge, purchase tickets for the Aug. 31 celebration, or for more information about Opportunity Project, call Paulette Hussey at 973-921-1000, ext. 105.



Photo By Sean Havey - Springfield resident Ted Stampoulos, left, is accompanied on a walk down Main Street in Millburn by Dave D'Addio, his personal trainer. Stampoulos is donating the proceeds of his weight loss challenge to charity.