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ShopRite chain goes to bat for Gehrig's disease support group

BY HARTRIONO B. SASTROWARDOYO, STAFF WRITER



From left: Thomas Saker, Joe Saker Jr. and Richard J. Saker, all of Saker ShopRites, present Terry Magovern of Rumson and Brad Dancy of Middletown with a \$183,000 check from the supermarket chain's latest Strike Out ALS fundraising campaign, at the Brick ShopRite.

BRICK — Associates and customers of Saker ShopRites in Central Jersey stepped up to the plate when they raised \$183,000 for the Joan Dancy and People With ALS support group.

ALS, amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, also known as Lou Gehrig's disease, is neurodegenerative disease affecting nerve cells in the brain and spinal cord. The disease became associated with the baseball player after he had to retire early from the game due to ALS, which led to his death at the age of 37.

On Saturday, officials from Saker ShopRites presented Terry Magovern of Rumson with an oversized check. Magovern was the fiance of Joan Dancy, a Middletown resident who died from ALS in 2005. It was Dancy's wish that Magovern establish a local ALS support group.

"My mom wanted to create a resource for people with ALS, so they don't feel alone," said Brad Dancy, 25, of Middletown, Joan's son. "We're glad to be helping out people (with ALS) in our own area."

SUPPORT GROUP

The Joan Dancy and People With ALS support group meets at 6:30 p.m. the first Tuesday of every month at Riverview Medical Center in Red Bank. Call (732) 450-2677 for more information..

Richard J. Saker of Millstone Township, Saker ShopRites president and CEO, said associates had solicited from customers \$1 and \$4 donations in the latest Strike Out ALS fundraiser, which began in April. Saker ShopRites matched the \$4 donations, he said.

Last October, Saker ShopRites raised \$123,000 for Joan Dancy and People With ALS in its first fundraiser.

“(The money will) augment established services that other associations have in place. Where there are no services, we will find a way to make them available,” Magovern said.

He added: “It’s a quality-of-life issue. While one person may have it, ALS affects the entire family.”

In addition to Saker ShopRites’ efforts, there have been benefit concerts for the support group. One in December at the Count Basie Theatre in Red Bank featured Bon Jovi, Bruce Springsteen and Bobby Bandiera. More recently, Jackson Browne performed in June at the Two River Theater, also in Red Bank, for Joan Dancy and People With ALS.

Another Saker ShopRites drive for Joan Dancy and People With ALS will be held in late September or early October, Saker said, adding that the company plans to continue holding fundraising campaigns twice a year.

A cold-water plunge is scheduled for February in Manasquan, also to raise money for Joan Dancy and People With ALS, as well as for staytough.fightHARD. Inc., another ALS support group.

“About a half dozen people didn’t know about a local ALS group, didn’t know how to get help” until they saw Saker ShopRites’ efforts, Magovern said.

“It’s something where everybody can make a difference,” Saker said.