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Rutgers 5K Looks to Stomp Out Regional Hunger

MIDDLESEX COUNTY – After the last step treads across the finish line, and the crowd and medals descend from High Point Solutions Stadium, the Yacone family almost immediately resets their fundraising clock for the Run for Rutgers Against Hunger 5K and Walk.

"Next year starts now," announced patriarch John Yacone Sunday in anticipation of the clan's post-walk, strategy breakfast. "This year, we donated 475-plus cans. We're a big Rutgers family…and we like to give to people in need."

It was a widespread mindset for many of this weekend's 362 participants, who laced up their sneakers and dipped into their cupboards and wallets, in a concerted effort to fight hunger.

In its seventh year, Run for RAH, a venture of the Rutgers University Alumni Association, energized race-goers to raise almost $7,500 in donations and collect approximately 1,650 pounds of nonperishable items for the Middlesex County food bank.

"While there are people who come from all over, most participants are local," said Assistant Secretary to Rutgers University Christopher Retzko, who doubles as a Run for RAH organizer and Alumni Association member. "They really want to keep it local and (the Middlesex County food bank) distributes to locations in our region that are most in need."

In recent years, the Middlesex County Food Organization and Outreach Distribution Services has witnessed a steady incline in the number of pantries, soup kitchens and agencies it serves, currently reporting 90 among its registered affiliates.

"Hunger is a reality for struggling families across our county," said Jennifer Apostol, project manager with the Middlesex County Improvement Authority, the entity tasked with the MCFOODS' operation. "Run for RAH has become our saving grace at a time when donations are so scarce."

Organizers ended the day's festivities of music, games, raffles and giveaways on a high note with an awards ceremony for lead fundraisers, top food collectors, fastest runners and the like.

"We need more people like this out there in the world, who are willing to go the extra mile to help those in need," said Freeholder Deputy Director Carol Bellante. "We applaud their efforts, as well as the University's alumni and coordinators, who have far surpassed the bar in terms of community outreach."

For more information on MCFOODS and its services, interested parties can log onto www.mciauth.com.

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