



Photo by Gerald Wiens

Frank Alonso's loved ones 'demand better' with 'You'll Never Run Alone 5K'

By Marcia Locke

On Sept. 28, 2018, Frank Alonso was diagnosed with stage IV pancreatic cancer. The beloved soccer coach, husband and father had planned to fight it, but he died less than six weeks later, on Nov. 4. He had just turned 52 years old.

Within a few months, Frank's wife, Jennifer, and daughters, Isabella and Sophia, had already started planning a 5K to honor him and raise

money for pancreatic cancer research and a community soccer scholarship.

"Soccer was Frank's passion," Jennifer said. "And now it's my passion to fight the disease that took his passion away from him and took him from his family and the community he touched."

Frank coached soccer in the Manhattan community for 20 years, including 13 seasons as head coach

for the Manhattan High School boys' soccer team. He was inducted into the Kansas Soccer Hall of Fame in February 2020 in recognition of his contributions to soccer in the state.

As an avid runner and graphic designer, Jennifer thought a 5K would be a good way for her to honor Frank, rally his loved ones and raise money for cancer research. So, she, Isabella and Sophia partnered with Manhattan Running Company and planned the You'll Never Run Alone 5K for Aug. 18, 2019.

The 5K's name is inspired by the song, "You'll Never Walk Alone," composed by Rodgers and Hammerstein and later popularized by Gerry and the Pacemakers. It is the anthem of England's Liverpool Football Club, Frank's favorite professional soccer team.

Jennifer and team worked hard on the event's logistics and publicity, approached potential sponsors and recruited volunteers. Registrations poured in, as did support from numerous sponsors, including the event's major sponsor and Frank's employer, Cox Media.

On race day, lingering overnight storms threatened to cancel the event. But the sky cleared up just in time and Manhattan saw possibly its largest inaugural 5K ever. As a testament to the admiration surrounding Frank in the Manhattan community, the event drew 350 participants. Many of Frank's former soccer players and friends showed up to honor him and support the Alonso family.

"I am so blown away and humbled by this community's generosity and support," Jennifer said. "For a first-year race, these numbers are unheard of!"

The inaugural You'll Never Run Alone 5K raised an impressive \$10,900 for the Johnson Cancer Research Center's pancreatic cancer research team. This multidisciplinary ensemble of outstanding scientists is working to develop better early-detection methods and cutting-edge drug therapies for pancreatic cancer.



Jennifer and Sophia presented the donation check to the Johnson Cancer Research Center at the Sept. 21, 2019, K-State soccer game. Frank had been a respected friend of K-State soccer and Coach Mike Dibbini, who were pleased to support this tribute.

The second annual You'll Never Run Alone 5K is scheduled for Aug. 9, 2020. Like last year, Jennifer hopes to attract people of all physical abilities and interests to join in the fun whether they run or walk. She also plans to offer a virtual race for faraway participants.

"Together, we will honor Frank and demand better for all those who have lost their battle to pancreatic cancer and all those who are still fighting," Jennifer said. "With friends and family by your side, you'll never walk or run alone."



Coach Snyder has selected the Johnson Cancer Research Center to be one of four great organizations supported by the 2020 Bill Snyder Highway Half-Marathon and 5K. Join the fun in Manhattan, Kansas, May 23, 2020! billsnyderhighwayhalf.com

Every gift helps, and more than 95% of funds donated come from gifts of less than \$1,000.