

Racing for unity



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COLUMBUS -- With each step Heath Zinnel took, a smile began to grow on his face.

Wearing a red T-shirt and a Santa Claus hat, the Columbus man walked the final 75 yards to the finish line of the We Can Run, Walk and Roll 5K and 1 Mile Race with the help of a physical therapist. A crowd, including his parents, Gary and Deb Zinnel, were there to cheer him on.

“He walks a little bit further every year,” Gary Zinnel said of his son.

The past two years, Heath Zinnel has been participating the race. It welcomes people of all ability levels, from experienced runners to those with disabilities, to participate.

The Saturday event was held in Pawnee Park with 270 people taking part. Zinnel was one of a few in wheelchairs who were navigated through the park and inside Memorial Stadium by members of his team. Once he got within walking distance from the finish, he got to his feet and used a walker to complete his race.

Zinnel was in a traffic accident in 2002 and was in a coma for three months. Years of physical therapy have helped him regain some function.

We Can Run, Walk and Roll was created to give an opportunity for everyone to compete, no matter what their ability, said Doug Janssen, director of rehab services at Columbus Community Hospital and event coordinator.

This is the third year the event has been held and it was inspired by the story of Dick and Rick Hoyt, a father and son team that have ran together for years. Rick Hoyt has

cerebral palsy, and his father has pushed him in a wheelchair in marathons and races across the country.

Shawn Riedmiller, of Columbus, was doing the same, at least for one day, with his son, Joey.

“We have our whole family here,” Riedmiller said. “We don’t get many opportunities to get out and do things that support Joey.”

The 9-year-old boy has Cornelia de Lange Syndrome (CdLS), a genetic disorder that can cause physical, cognitive and mental challenges.

While the race served as a way to bring about unity, it also holds another purpose.

Money raised through the event is used to purchase special adaptive tricycles for both adults and children with physical disabilities.

With the money raised in the first two years, eight AmTryke tricycles were purchased and given to people in the area.

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