

Keeping a promise to Patrick

Sister vows to raise awareness for esophageal cancer

By Jeff Shmase

PEABODY – About five years ago, Shannon Downey was circulating an e-mail to friends and family when she received a response from her older brother Patrick. Shannon, a long distance runner, was preparing for the Susan G. Komen run for breast cancer, seeking financial support. Patrick, who was ill at the time with esophageal cancer, said he wished there was some of fundraising program to raise money and awareness for the disease that would kill him a year later.

Their mother Fran, herself a breast cancer survivor, promised Patrick they would.

That happened this past Sunday when 136 ran in the first Patrick Downey 5K in the city's downtown. Proceeds from the race will benefit the Esophageal Cancer Awareness Association, a non-profit that offers support and education to patients and families. An estimated 10,000 people died from the disease last year and 16,640 new cases were diagnosed.

Patrick Downey died from the disease at the age of 39 in October 2007. A Highland Street resident – his parents still live in the house – Patrick was a talented artist and very intelligent, Shannon Downey

said.

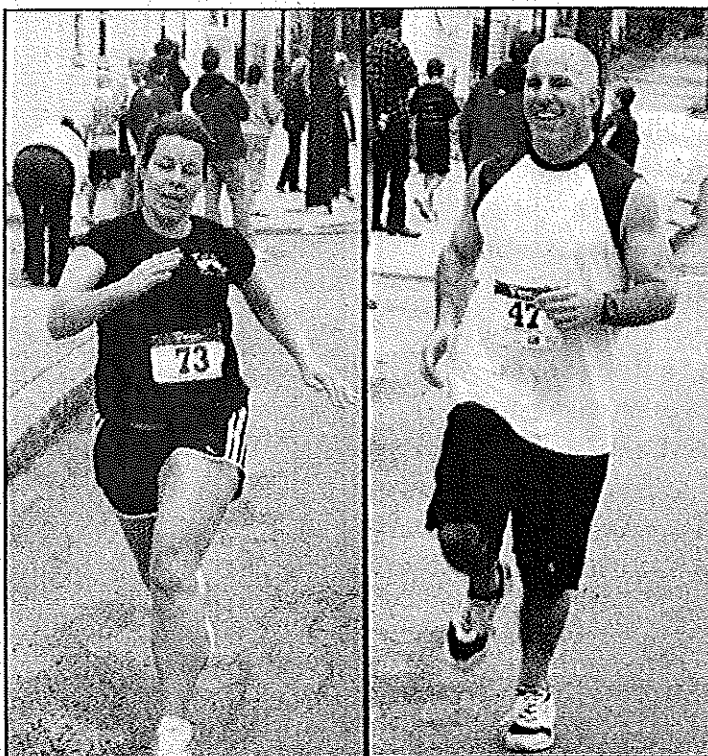
“He was the most unbelievable artist you’d see,” said Shannon Downey, who like her brother, Frank, still lives in Peabody. “Patrick was always drawing pictures of other people, but one time he did a self portrait when he was 20 years old. Not many people had seen it, so when they did they were amazed.”

Growing up, the Downeys all worked at McDonald’s together, as did a bunch of

their friends, with Patrick serving as the manager. He would leave a cartoon for the next shift manager to inform the manager how his shift went.

Patrick attended St. John’s Prep and later the Maryland Institute of Art. He later moved to California where he was married and raising three children, 11, 6 and 5. Prior to

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Jennifer Baker of Topsfield and John Lewis of Amesbury were two of the Patrick Downey 5K 136 participants on Sunday. The race took place in downtown Peabody.

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his death, Patrick was teaching art at the Art Institute of San Francisco.

“Patrick loved music and to laugh,” Shannon Downey said. “In addition to art, he loved his wife and children. He was a great father, a wonderful person and a lot of fun.”

Among the 136 runners was a friend who had moved to California but returned to honor Patrick. The race went

fairly smoothly, said Shannon Downey, the race’s coordinator who received assistance from her nieces Brigid, 15, and Cara 10. An estimated \$2,000 was raised. Runners also learned more about the disease through informational pamphlets that Shannon Downey distributed.

To make a contribution to the association, visit www.ecaware.org.



Courtesy Photo

Michael Treacy of Danvers participated in the 5k in Peabody on Sunday.