

# Potomac ALMANAC

NEWS

JUNE 7-13, 2006 ♦ VOLUME L, NUMBER 23



PHOTO BY ALEX SCOFIELD/THE ALMANAC

Volunteers gather at the conclusion of the 2005 Cure Autism Now 5K. More volunteers are needed for this year's CAN 5K, at Potomac Library on July 4. Those interested in volunteering should call Susan Pereles at 301-461-0990.

## Teaming Up for July 4

Sixth annual CAN 5K approaches; KEEN to benefit.

BY ALEX SCOFIELD  
THE ALMANAC

There's less than a month to go before the sixth annual Cure Autism Now 5K, a road race that is now an established Potomac Fourth of July tradition. Former Potomac residents will return to town to run or volunteer in the race. Teams of runners whose families' and friends' lives are affected by autism will run with T-shirts showing the child they are running for.

Susan Pereles founded the inaugural CAN 5K in 2001 after her nephew, Shant Ayanian, was diagnosed with autism. Shant is now 8 years old, and attending a private school in Boston. "There was a little bit of a breakthrough with him," Pereles said. While Shant is still not verbal, he shot up academically and demonstrates math and some reading skills for his grade level.

Lucas Houk, now 14, is another familiar name to regulars of the CAN 5K. Team Lucas has been a presence in the race for several years, and more than 200 Team Lucas runners competed in last year's race. On the CAN 5K Web site, team captains Pat Bailey and George Houk said that Lucas, now 14, has developed a love for running, and has medals in several Special Olympic running events. This year, they expect Lucas to be the starting runner for Team Lucas.

**TO SOME EXTENT**, Shant's and Lucas' progress reflects the progress that the medical community has made in autism research since 2001. Pereles said that the prevailing belief was once that those with autism were unlikely to make any progress after the age of 5. Now people with autism are making significant changes in young adulthood. "The brain," Pereles said, "is always creating new pathways. ... It's just a matter of time now."

While the breakthroughs are becoming more frequent and at later ages, children are being diagnosed with autism at a higher rate — 1 in 166, according to Cure Autism Now — than they were in 2001. For now, said Pereles, "this disease isn't going away."

Last year's CAN 5K raised \$175,000, and Pereles hopes to top that this year. More than 20 teams have already registered, and have pledged a total of \$73,000 and counting.

SEE CURE AUTISM NOW 5K. PAGE 5

### Calling all Volunteers

CAN 5K founder and director Susan Pereles is looking for more people to volunteer for this year's race. In previous years, volunteer responsibilities included directing parking, monitoring the race course, giving out flags or prizes. While the race gets a good number of repeat volunteers, Pereles said, they need more for this year's race.

Those interested in volunteering should call Susan Pereles at 301-461-0990.

### Cure Autism Now July Fourth 5K

**What:** The sixth annual 5-kilometer run and one-mile fun walk that benefits Cure Autism Now, a national nonprofit organization of parents, clinicians and scientists working together to find biomedical treatments and a cure for autism and related disorders.

**When:** Tuesday, July 4. Pre-race warmup at 7:30 a.m.; 5K road race begins 8 a.m., 1-mile walk begins 8:05 a.m.

**Where:** At Potomac Library, near the intersection of River and Falls roads in Potomac.

**How:** Register online at [www.canrun.org](http://www.canrun.org)

**How much:** Entry fee \$25 until June 15, \$30 June 16-July 1, \$35 at Potomac Promenade July 3, \$40 at Potomac Library on July 4. Children 14 and under \$15.

**What else:** Visit [www.canrun.org](http://www.canrun.org) for more information about the CAN 5K; visit [www.cureautismnow.org](http://www.cureautismnow.org) for more information about Cure Autism Now.



PHOTO BY ALEX SCOFIELD/THE ALMANAC

**Dan McGuire of the Gaithersburg Washington Grove Volunteer Fire Department demonstrates his firefighting equipment for Elizabeth Griffin, 21, and her father, Henry Griffin of Gaithersburg.**

## Fourth of July Tradition

FROM PAGE 4

For the first time, the CAN 5K will be a chip race — each runner wears a chip on his or her shoe that helps track the runner's finishing time. A cash prize of \$200 will go to the first male runner and the first female runner to finish, and as in recent years, Pereles expects a competitive field of runners from Northern Virginia and Washington, D.C.

**EACH YEAR**, a portion of the registration proceeds from the CAN 5K go to a local charity. For the second straight year, that will be Kids Enjoy Exercise Now (KEEN) Greater DC, a volunteer organization that provides exercise activities to children with physical and mental disabilities.

"We don't turn anyone down, regardless of the severity of their disability," said Kate Hurson, vice president of KEEN Greater D.C. "If what [the athlete's] need is just to run around the gym for an hour, they can do that."

Children with autism make up a significant number of KEEN's athletes. While there are several thriving adaptive sports organizations in the area, KEEN is one of

the few that provides such services to children with extreme autism. Every KEEN athlete works one-on-one with a trained volunteer.

"Scott has made so many friends with KEEN," Hurson said about her 18-year-old son, who is especially fond of KEEN's swimming and tennis programs. On occasion, she'll be out at the grocery store with Scott and run into a friend he's made at a KEEN event.

"It gives us as parents such a warm feeling to know he has another life with KEEN," Hurson said. That environment, Hurson said, comes from each athlete being paired with "a volunteer who just wants to be with them."

KEEN has minimal commitment requirements for its volunteers. Many come back on their own initiative. "They tend to get kind of hooked," Kate Hurson said. Several volunteers have changed careers once they became involved with KEEN, and there have been five marriages between KEEN volunteers in the 14-year history of the D.C. chapter.

"You don't need prior training," said Dan Murphy, president of KEEN Greater DC. "We do the training for them when they come to the first session."

KEEN held its annual Sports Festival at Hadley's Park on Sunday, June 4. Throughout the afternoon, athletes joined volunteers in unstructured activities like frisbee, soccer or games of catch. Some athletes also participated in organized games like tug-of-war.

Like Team Lucas, Team KEEN was a highly visible part of last year's CAN 5K, and they'll be back this year. More than 40 KEEN participants have set a goal to raise \$3,000 this year.

### KEEN on Exercise

Just like last year, 10 percent of the CAN 5K race registration fees will benefit Kids Enjoy Exercise Now (KEEN) Greater DC, a volunteer-run nonprofit organization that provides free one-on-one recreational opportunities for children and young adults with mental and physical disabilities. KEEN now has five national chapters, but its flagship chapter is in Washington, D.C.

For more information on KEEN, visit [www.keenusa.org](http://www.keenusa.org).