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Fair Lawn's Frank Piccininni Celebrates Son's 20-Year Heart Transplant Anniversary by Running 'Homemade' Marathon to Raise Awareness and Funds to Support Organ and Tissue Donation

(Fair Lawn, NJ) – Frank Piccininni of Fair Lawn, NJ, recently ran his own 'homemade' 26.2-mile marathon in Bergen County to raise awareness and funds to support the Sharing Network *Foundation* and the Hearts for Emma Partner Fund. Family and friends of the Piccininni family came together to raise more than \$4,600 in honor of Frank's son Christopher Piccininni's 20-year heart transplant anniversary.

"Christopher was given a second chance at life when he received a heart transplant in December 2001 when he was just 6-months old," said Frank. "Without this gift, Christopher would not be with us today. His life is a daily reminder of the power of organ and tissue donation and transplantation. We feel extremely blessed, and are committed to raising awareness about the importance of registering as organ and tissue donors to help save lives."

During Frank's homemade "Running for Christopher" marathon, he trekked through neighborhoods and paths in Fair Lawn, Rochelle Park and Ridgewood before ending his route in Dunkerhook Park in Paramus. Although Frank has completed at least nine official marathons, he wanted this one to be extra special in honor of Christopher's transplant anniversary. After 4:20:56 (four hours, 20 minutes, 6 seconds), Frank was greeted at the finish line by his wife Jacky, sons Christopher and Ryan, and many friends and loved ones.

"When I was thinking about doing this, I didn't want to travel and, because he is immunocompromised, I wanted to keep Christopher safe," said Frank. "I am used to running alone so it was inspiring to see my family and friends at the start, finish and throughout the route."

Christopher, now 20, was just nine weeks old when he was diagnosed with dilated cardiomyopathy, a condition which enlarged his heart, making it unable to pump enough blood. His only hope for survival was a heart transplant. After spending four months at Mount Sinai Medical Center's Pediatric ICU in Manhattan, thanks to his donor, he underwent a successful heart transplant, giving him a second chance at life.

Christopher continues to live a healthy and active lifestyle as a student at NJIT studying biomedical engineering. He graduated from Fair Lawn High School where he competed as a varsity swimmer all four years.

"I am so proud of my dad for running to raise money for the Sharing Network *Foundation* and the Hearts for Emma Partner Fund," said Christopher. "After being given 20 years of life that I wouldn't have gotten without a transplant, the only thing we can do in return is to help raise funds and advocate for organ and tissue donation."

According to United Network for Organ Sharing (UNOS), nearly 4,000 New Jersey residents are waiting for a life-saving transplant. One person in New Jersey dies every three days waiting for a transplant. Just one organ and tissue donor can save eight lives and enhance the lives of over 75 people. To learn more, get involved and register as an organ and tissue donor, visit www.NJSharingNetwork.org.

About NJ Sharing Network

Dedicated to saving lives through organ and tissue donation, NJ Sharing Network is the nonprofit organization responsible for the recovery and placement of donated organs and tissue for the nearly 4,000 New Jersey residents waiting for a life-saving transplant. With headquarters in New Providence, NJ, the organization, selected by NJBIZ as one of the state's "Best Places to Work" for the fourth consecutive year, is also part of the national recovery system, serving the 110,000 people on the national waiting list.

About the Sharing Network *Foundation*

The Sharing Network *Foundation* is committed to increasing the number of lives saved through innovative transplant research, family support, public awareness and education about the life-saving benefits of organ and tissue donation and transplantation. By making a contribution, you empower our efforts, bringing us a step closer to providing the greatest gift of all... the Gift of Life.

About Hearts for Emma

Hearts for Emma provides assistance to families of children with heart disease and supports educational initiatives relating to heart transplantation and organ and tissue donation. As a Partner Fund of the NJ Sharing Network *Foundation*, Hearts for Emma has raised more than \$50,000 and has helped educate more than 100,000 students about donation and transplant through NJ Sharing Network's high school outreach program.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF NJ SHARING NETWORK



The Piccininni Family – (l-r) Jacky, Christopher, Frank and Ryan



Running for Christopher Finish Line



Christopher and Frank Piccininni