Friendly challenge turns into annual fundraising race

Chris Uszynski's annual run for Alzheimer's disease began with a challenge between friends to run 69 km across Essex County.

"We asked each other, why don't we do it for a reason?" recalls Uszynski, 41.

His friend's grandfather had just died with the disease and Uszynski's own father has lived with it for 19 years.

In the past three years, Uszynski and his fellow runners -- 250 ran part of last year's route while 13 did the whole thing -- have raised $60,000 for the Alzheimer Society of Windsor-Essex County, and upped the distance to 100 km.

"We make a spectacle of ourselves. People honk at us, they wave -- mostly with all five fingers," he says. "We go through all these towns and show people we care about caregivers."

"My mom is my hero"

And that, in the end, is what it's all about. Uszynski's mother, a retired nurse, has cared for his father at home for nearly two decades. She's the one he thinks of each September as he pounds the pavement from dawn to dusk.

"My mom is my hero. Running 100 km is absolutely nothing compared to being a caregiver. It really isn't," he says. "I go to bed after the event. I go to sleep. Caregivers don't really get to sleep in case their loved ones wander. They don't get a break."

Uszynski says he would eventually like to make his annual run a national event.

Become a volunteer

Your local Alzheimer Society offers a wide range of volunteering opportunities, from facilitating day programs, to helping around the office, to fundraising. Giving your time and talent helps make life easier for people living with dementia in your community.

Learn more about becoming a volunteer.