

Cupid's Chase 5K comes to the Valley

By Jennifer Sheehan
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Amal Afif and Barbara Stockdale live in a small ranch home on Cambridge Circle in South Whitehall Township.

Both women have physical disabilities that require them to use walkers and wheelchairs to get around.

Fortunately for the two ladies, this home is fully accessible, thanks to Community Options, a nonprofit that provides housing and employment services to adults with serious disabilities.

One big way Community Options can continue to help people like Afif and Stockdale is through the Cupid's Chase 5K, which will be held at different sites throughout the country on Valentine's Day.

This year's event will be held at 26 locations, and one of them for the first time will be in the Lehigh Valley. The local 5K will start at 10 a.m. Feb. 14 at Bob Rodale Cycling and Fitness Park in Trexlertown.

All the proceeds from Cupid's Chase go directly to supporting Community Options' programs for the disabled. Last year, \$200,000 was raised across the country through Cupid's Chase events.

This will be the seventh year for the Cupid's Chase 5K.

"It's the largest simultaneous 5K race in the country," says Brian Dion, state director for Community Options.

Community Options, based in Princeton, N.J., operates in 38 cities, including Allentown, in eight states, and supports thousands of people and their families. In Pennsylvania, the nonprofit also has offices in Pittsburgh and Philadelphia.

Its mission is to provide housing, support services and advocacy assistance to help empower people with disabilities.

The home on Cambridge Circle, for example, has a newly remodeled bathroom to provide accessibility for Afif and Stockdale, says Michele Reinert, executive director of Community Options of Northeastern Pennsylvania.

Community Options has been helping people with severe disabilities at its Allentown office for about three years, Dion says. Typically the clients served by Community Options are those with intellectual disabilities.

Community Options operates 12 homes in Lehigh County and one in Northampton, with about 30 clients enrolled. All homes are staffed 24 hours a day by Community Options.

Employment services also are a big part of what Community Options does. Clients are placed in either paid or volunteer jobs, depending on their ability. The Allentown office helps about 25 people with employment services.

Cupid's Chase 5K organizers are hoping to attract about 100 participants to the local race.

The 5K has a serious purpose but that doesn't mean it won't be fun. It is on Valentine's Day after all.

If you're single, there's a chance you might make a love connection. Singles can wear "Available" T-shirts and those with partners or are married can wear "Unavailable" shirts.

You can run the 5K of course, but joggers, walkers and "rollers" (those who use wheelchairs or push baby strollers) are invited to take part, too.

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CUPID'S CHASE:

•**When:** Registration, 8 a.m.; race begins 10 a.m. Feb. 14

•**Where:** Bob Rodale Cycling and Fitness Park, 1151 Mosser Road, Trexlertown

•**How much:** \$30 before Feb. 13, \$50 on race day

•**Info:** 484-221-8806, <http://www.comop.org/cupidschase>

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