

Q&A Corner with local Cupid's Chase 5K Chairs around the United States

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Helen Dainty, Chair of the Cookeville Cupid's Chase 5K

Why is supporting Community Options, specifically the Cupid's Chase 5K Run, important to you?

I have been involved with special education for my entire professional career and as a special educator I realize the importance of supporting individuals with disabilities beyond the school years. The Cupid's Chase is just a way to provide financial support for activities provided during the year.

On a professional level, what do you do for work and how can the work you do with the Cupid's Chase 5K and Community Options benefit you professionally as well?

I am a college professor who teaches pre-service teachers about special education and teaching persons with disabilities. I am able to provide volunteers for Cupid's Chase as I require volunteer hours from my students as we are public servants and we need to give back to the community. This is a way to give back to our community. In any endeavor with persons with disabilities, I gain more than I ever give. It is not about me, but I guess it is part of my giving back-volunteer belief system that contributed to receiving the Professional Service Award for Faculty from TTU in May 2011.

Nicole von Oy, Chair of the Connecticut Cupid's Chase 5K Run

How did you become involved with Community Options? Was becoming the Cupid's Chase 5K Chair your first introduction?

I have been a long time friend with Jeffrey Moyer, the Executive Director of Community Options in CT. Jeff and I had lost touch for quite some time and when we reconnected, I discovered he was working with individuals with disabilities. He came to know that I had been becoming actively involved in races and that I had always had an interest in working with those who have disabilities. I had recently been volunteering my time with the CT Special Olympics - Winter games and looking for ways I could continue to be involved in other times of the year. Jeff approached me and asked if I would like to be a part of the race committee and of course I could not refuse.

The Cupid's Chase 5K Run is the largest, simultaneous run held by any charity in the United States. How does that make you feel to be a part of such a large movement?

I am naturally drawn to large movements being that I am a community organizer. I am thrilled and excited to be part of such a great event. Last year was our first year for this event in CT and went better than we could have ever imagined. We only hope to continue to grow it bigger and bigger each year.

Tell us something unique about you!

I am a very active triathlete and will be training for a half ironman starting in November 2011 and I have a side business making cheesecake balls called Schatzi's. They are perfectly proportioned confections.

Donald Weidknecht, Chair of the Nashville Cupid's Chase 5K Run

How did you become involved with Community Options? Was becoming the Cupid's Chase 5K Chair your

first introduction?

I first became involved with Community Options in 2004 as a COBAC member. In 2006 I was nominated to be President of the COBAC Board and served in that capacity until 2010. Becoming the Cupid's Chase Chair combined my dedication to serving Individuals with Disabilities and Running.

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The fact that Cupid's Chase is touching so many communities at once is impressive. However, the underlying clear message is more important to me because it says that we support a group of individuals that have been traditionally marginalized and voiceless. This run has become a significant leader in breaking that silence.

On a professional level, what do you do for work and how can the work you do with the Cupid's Chase 5K and Community Options benefit you professionally as well?

I am currently the District Manager for FoodStaff in Nashville and we have hired several individuals with disabilities to work at various job sites. This has not only filled a business need for our company and contributed to the economic well being of various employees but it has also sent a message to other employers of the value of a hiring people with disabilities.

Stephanie Parrish, Chair of the South Carolina Cupid's Chase 5K Run

How did you become involved with Community Options? Was becoming the Cupid's Chase 5K Chair your first introduction?

Community Options, Inc. started in South Carolina in 2007 and the Community Options Business Advisory Council was formed. I have been acting Chair of this council since its inception. I love that this organization not only provides residential support for individuals with disabilities but that they also help to provide employment support as well. I received a masters in rehabilitation counseling from the University of Tennessee and I understand how difficult it can be for this population to be served with dignity and respect- and that is just how Community Options, Inc. treats its consumers.

Why is supporting Community Options, specifically the Cupid's Chase 5K Run, important to you?

I think supporting Cupid's Chase is important because it not only brings attention to a population that is underserved but it also brings about awareness that we all have the ability to make a difference- whether it is running or walking the race, sponsoring the event, or even bringing about a conversation about what we, as a community, can do to help. When you visit an individual who is being served by Community Options, Inc. at their residence, you immediately know why it is an important organization to support and Cupid's Chase is an extension of that support. It allows these programs to grow and reach more people in our community.

The Cupid's Chase 5K Run is the largest, simultaneous run held by any charity in the United States. How does that make you feel to be a part of such a large movement?

It has been amazing to see the excitement for Cupid's Chase grow in our community. Our race has become so large that this year we moved it to Finley Park in Downtown Columbia. Our current Governor, Nikki Haley, is our Honorary Chair. Cupid's Chase is a fun atmosphere and brings attention to a great cause. It allows us to support those in our community who are living with disabilities. This is a group that I am proud to support.

On a professional level, what do you do for work and how can the work you do with the Cupid's Chase 5K and Community Options benefit you professionally as well?

I am the Program Coordinator for Women in Philanthropy. Women in Philanthropy, in collaboration with

the United Way of the Midlands and Central Carolina Community Foundation is dedicated to transforming our community through active and collective philanthropic investment. Women in Philanthropy is comprised of an Executive Board and 6 subcommittees. Having the opportunity to Chair the COBAC board for the past 4 years has helped me to understand what it means to be a volunteer who wants to make a difference with their time and resources. I have been able to use my skills in order to encourage our COBAC group to focus on the big picture of making a difference and changing the lives of individuals in our community.





CUPID'S CHASE 5K 2013 Community Options, Inc. Supporting People with Disabilities since 1989 www.comop.org



