

ON THE MOVE

Remembering a special runner

Scotty Spencer, according to his father, liked to stretch out the activities that he enjoyed.

"He would walk the dog and it was supposed to take 15 minutes, but it took 45 minutes," Dennis Spencer said. "Because he would stop and talk to everyone."

As a cross-country runner, Scotty also took a long time to complete his races. But that was not due to distractions; it was because he was severely disabled.

Scotty was born with multiple birth defects and was not expected to survive past the age of 2. Yet he not only lived into adolescence, he even became an athlete at Newark Valley High School. He was also an active volunteer at his church, First Baptist Church of Newark Valley.

Moving across race courses with his right arm noticeably shorter than his left, Scotty was a memorable cross-country runner — but not because he won. In fact, he usually brought up the rear. Just the fact that he even completed each race was remarkable, said Sarah Frankoski and Laura Kania, parishioners at St. John the Evangelist Church in Newark Valley.

"I think he was happy just to finish," said Sarah, 16, a former cross-country teammate of Scotty's.

"He was such an inspiration," added Laura, 16, who, along with Scotty, served as manager of Newark Valley's wrestling squad.

Scotty died unexpectedly in July 1999, just one month past his 18th birthday, after he accidentally fell and hit his head at home. However, his memory lives on in this Tioga County village through a road race in his name, "Scotty's 5K." The first annual event took place July 29 at Newark Valley's Trout Ponds Park.

Paul Strobe, a race organizer, said that Scotty's 5K attracted 202 runners as well as 73 people in the walking division. These numbers, he remarked, were about double what he had anticipated.

"For a first race, that's really phenomenal," he said.

"We knew Scott left an impression on Newark Valley, the whole village. This is a beautiful turnout," Dennis Spencer said.

"It's a good way to get people to come out and it's something (Scotty) liked to do. I think he'd be happy that we were doing this today," said Nick Frankoski, 19, who ran in Scotty's 5K with his sister Sarah and brother Ben, 15.

Nick placed fifth in the 5K race, which wound through several of the village's streets. The winning time was posted by Graham Baird of Vestal, who ran the course in 16 minutes, 33 seconds. Top female finisher was Lynann Lorenze of Apalachin, with a time of 19:40.

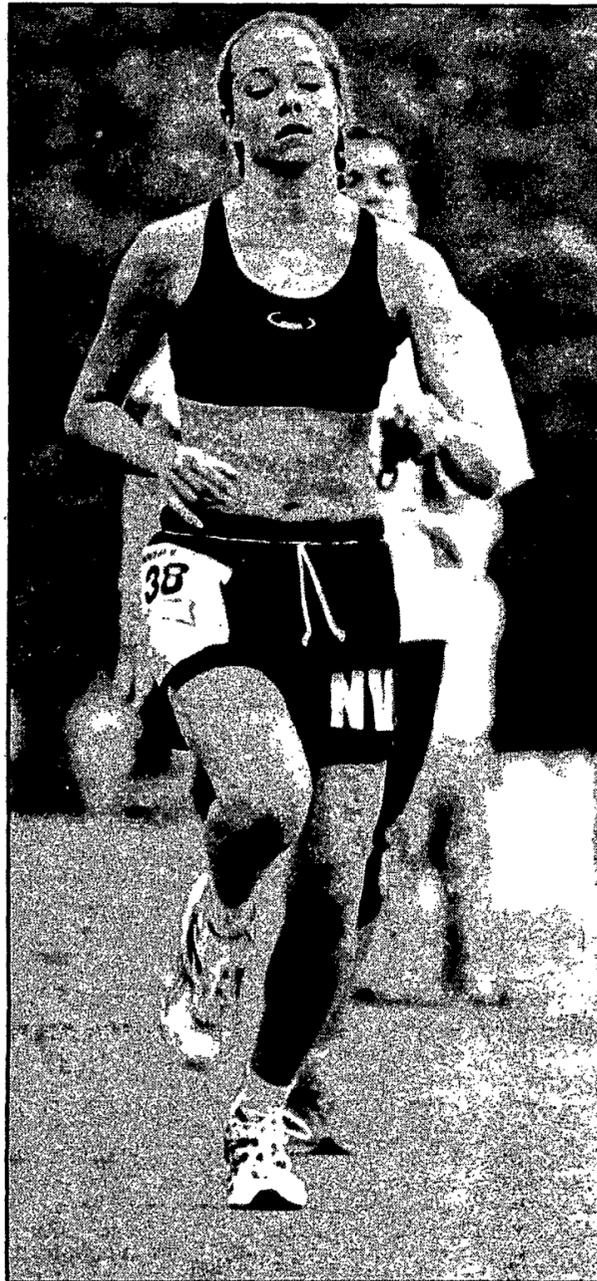
Strobe, a friend of the Spencer family, had surfaced the idea for the road race not long after Scotty's death. From there, Scotty's older brother Brian designed a Web site (www.scotty5k.freesevers.com) which Strobe updates and maintains.

Eric D'Arcy, a St. John the Evangelist parishioner, was also integral in setting up Scotty's 5K. D'Arcy teaches social studies at Newark Valley High and is also the cross-country and wrestling coach. He said that he and Scotty "became very close" in the year before Scotty died.

"He never missed a practice, and he was at every meet," D'Arcy said, although he noted that



Scotty Spencer, who died last year, "always had fun," a cross-country teammate said.



Sarah Frankoski, a former teammate of Scotty Spencer, runs toward the finish line.

Scotty initially had such difficulty with running that he nearly quit the team. But eventually, he came to be a symbol of perseverance — and still is today.

"A lot of times, when I go out running and things start getting hard, I think of Scott and how he got through it," D'Arcy said.

Two of the Scotty's 5K teen runners, Sarah and Laura, said that Scotty was guaranteed to bring a smile to one's face. Take, for instance, his colorful outfits when the team was traveling.

"He would always sit on the bus with his headphones on, listening to his country songs with his black Western hat and black sunglasses," she said. "He always had fun, and everybody's having fun today (July 29)."

Sarah added that Scotty "tried to make friends with everyone on the team," and Laura said that "he always cheered everybody on." So it's not surprising that the cross-country squad turned out in full force for Scotty's funeral.

"We went to the calling hours as a team, and we all wore our team jackets," Sarah said.

D'Arcy noted that many of his chats with Scotty were spiritual in nature, and that Scotty never complained about his physical limitations.

"I believe he had a very strong faith," D'Arcy said. "He believed that he'd been sent here for a reason."

COMING NEXT WEEK:

The team that could



Nick Frankoski (right) discusses the race course with his father, Edward, after the Scotty's 5K in Newark Valley on July 29.

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