

Honoring little boy lost by giving back

Alexander's Run to support scholarship, SUDC research

By Meir Rinde
STAFF WRITER

TRENTON — Michelle Emerson still feels the emptiness every day.

On an awful day in December 2008, her husband Dan Dodson called to say their 19-month-old son Alexander was in the hospital. He would not say what was wrong.

"Dan is telling me, 'I had to take Alexander to the emergency room. You have to get here right away,'" Emerson recalled. She rushed to the hospital. "As soon as I saw him, I just knew."

The exact cause of Alexander's death while he slept remains unknown, making him a victim of Sudden Unexplained Death in Childhood, or SUDC.



ALEXANDER DODSON

It is rarer than Sudden Infant Death Syndrome, which afflicts children less than a year old, but is no less devastating.

"It was a very, very, very difficult time," Emerson said.

Friends and neighbors rallied to their side, asking how they could help. Emerson

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Alexander

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recalls living in a fog, just "going through the motions of life."

In their search for a way to honor Alexander's name, a month after his passing they set up a scholarship fund with the Princeton Area Community Foundation, which initially helped pay the tuition of a child attending a private school in Trenton, Emerson said.

A neighbor hosted a reception fundraiser, and Emerson and Dodson began donating regularly to the fund. In May 2009 a tot lot playground near their Mill Hill home was named after Alexander.

This year the scholarship fund made a donation to Stuart Country Day's Summer Stars, a monthlong camp for second through sixth graders from Trenton that includes instruction on the humanities, science and math. Ten students were supported by the fund.

"We like to think that as part of our effort to help Trenton succeed, we're doing something Alexander would appreciate," Dodson said. "He'd love sending kids to the Stars summer program."

Emerson, Dodson and their friends also decided to put on Alexander's Run on Oct. 30

Sudden Unexplained Death in Childhood Program, an 11-year-old project of the Hackensack-based CJ Foundation for SIDS.

SUDC is diagnosed when all possible causes of death have been ruled out. It has a reported incidence of 1.2 deaths per 100,000 children, compared to 54 deaths per 100,000 for SIDS, according to the SUDC Program. The program depends solely on private donations and since 2001 has raised more than \$1 million for research, awareness and support services.

"We are hosting Alexander's

Run to raise awareness of this rare cause of childhood death," Emerson said, "and also to raise funds to research the causes, so that one day no other family will have to face this tragedy."

On-site registration for the run begins on Oct. 30 at 7:45 a.m. in Mill Hill Park, with the 5K starting in the park at 9 a.m. and the one-mile fun run/walk at 9:30 a.m. Registration for the 5K is \$20 in advance or \$25 on race day. The fun run is \$10 for the first family member and \$5 for each additional family member in the same

household. To register, visit www.alexandersrun.org/Registration.html.

The organization will have several activities in the park afterward, including performances by Alex of Alex & the Kaleidoscope Band, the Trenton Thrill Dancers, a costume contest for fun run participants and children's activities.

For more information, visit www.alexandersrun.org, [facebook.com/AlexandersRun](https://www.facebook.com/AlexandersRun), or [AlexandersRun on Twitter](https://twitter.com/AlexandersRun).

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