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# Remember 13

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## Where There's A Will There's a Way 5K

### The 13<sup>th</sup> Running of Hope's Greatest Run

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Johns Creek Neighbor magazine)



*Johns Creek GA:* The Will To Live Foundation's motto has always been "For the kids, through the kids, by the kids," and on February 4<sup>th</sup> of 2023, at Shakerag Park/River Trail Middle School in Johns Creek, GA, the kids of Will To Live will be holding 13<sup>th</sup> annual running of what they call "Hope's Greatest Run" The Where There's A Will There's A Way 5K.

Since 2011, every February, an average of 1200-1500 people have gathered on a cold Saturday morning in Johns Creek GA, to help raise the awareness of teen suicide in our communities and support a small 501(c)(3) non-profit called the Will To Live Foundation. John and Susie Trautwein, along with their family and friends, created this Foundation after the devastating loss of their son Will to depression and suicide back in October of 2010. Will was 15, a freshman at Northview High and a young man who had everything going for him. "He was big, strong, handsome, and healthy. He was successful in all walks of his life and had an army of friends who loved him dearly" explains John Trautwein, Will's father, and co-founder of Will To Live. "But Will had an illness that he didn't know existed.

As the foundation begins its 13<sup>th</sup> year, the message remains the same. Depression is an illness; it is not a choice or a character flaw or something you can be 'talked out of.' It is a diagnosable and treatable illness that today affects 1 in 5 of everyone we know. Trautwein will tell you from experience, however, that a mental illness is an illness unlike any other. "Because it has the word 'mental' in front of it, it carries with it a devastatingly strong stigma that causes people to keep it to themselves - they hide behind this mask, afraid to let anyone know that they have a mental issue."

John and Susie Trautwein both came from athletic families, where the concept of teammates was always prevalent. Susie was a college lacrosse and field hockey standout at University of VA and John, a Northwestern University, played 7 years of professional baseball including a year in the Big Leagues with the Boston Red Sox in 1988. At the funeral for their son, they recognized so many of their own "Life Teammates" who came from all over the country to be with them. As John explains, "Susie and I were so touched that teammates and friends from our childhood and particularly our high school and college days, were there for us during that terrible time of Will's death. We referred to them as our life friends - groomsmen and bridesmaids at our wedding, God parents to



For 13 years, the Will To Live Foundation's signature event, the Where There's A Will There's A Way 5K has drawn over 1000 people and has raised over \$1.0M



our kids; they were all friends we met when we were teenagers." Thus, the concept of Life Teammates was born.

Soon after the foundation formed, John was delivering "Life Teammate" speeches all over Fulton County, and in December of 2010, just 2 months after Will's death, two high school senior students from Northview High School, Sarah Biondich, and Michael Trainer visited the Trautweins and introduced them to their idea of a fundraising 5K called the "Where There's A Will There's A Way 5K". They wanted this to be a special event with a "team theme" that encourages attendees to sign up and run with their Life Teammates together. "Susie and I thought it was brilliant" says John, "and we were absolutely floored by the desire and resolve of these kids to "own" this event!"

Living up to the WTL Foundation's motto of "for and by the kids," this event didn't disappoint. That first 5K in 2011 raised \$25K and 10 years later the event was earning over \$200K, an incredible amount of money that goes to funding the acclaimed "Signs of Suicide" (SOS) program in high schools all over Atlanta and in cities across America. The event has also funded Summit On-site counseling in schools in N. Fulton County as



well as Life Teammates Scholarships over the year.

This year's event will be held once again at River Trail Middle School / Shakerag Park, on Saturday morning, February 4, 2023. Registration is now open. The cost is \$25/runner and if you sign up as a team, it's \$20/runner and all participants get a long sleeve Where There's A Will There's A Way 5K T-shirt. It's a fun run, so families and pets (on leashes, of course) are also welcome along with the experienced runners. More details are available on the Foundations website,

[www.Will-To-Live.org/willsway5k23/](http://www.Will-To-Live.org/willsway5k23/).

"Life is hard, and sometimes we need our friends to help us through it. Our friends, our Life Teammates, who truly understand us, and the obstacles we face are the easiest people in our lives to talk to. One in five of us suffer from a diagnosable mental illness, which is indeed, treatable, and beatable but it needs to be talked about. If we can get people to talk, we will lessen the stigma and we will improve their Will To Live!"

So, sign up for the Will To Live 5K today, bring your Life Teammates with you and join the kids of Will To Live as they "Deliver Hope" to each other!