

Old Bridge Funeral Home
2350 Route 516
Old Bridge Township, New Jersey 08857

Category 1i: Innovative Program Outreach, NFDA Pursuit of Excellence and BEST of the BEST Entry

Old Bridge Funeral Home establishes #jmgFit and first ever Mayor's Health and Wellness 5K with Old Bridge Township.



In December of 2018, Old Bridge Funeral Home held its year end company dinner. At that time, we acknowledged many staff members for their success throughout the year, including family survey responses, innovative funeral services, and tenure achievements with our firm. One very unique and noteworthy achievement that was announced, had nothing to do with funeral service. In fact, it was a very personal and intimate acknowledgement that had to do with their health, it was a lifestyle change and weight loss.

The change in lifestyle all started after the birth of Mr. Hernandez's third child and daughter in Feb of 2017, he decided he needed to be active and healthy to be there for his children. He lost 30 pounds in three months and slowly began exercising. In just a little over a year he went from couch surfing to running Triathlons and placing in various running races and Spartan OCR. This slowing began to influence the staff of Old Bridge Funeral Home, and one by one, each found their own activity or joined in races.

Several of our team members caught the fitness bug by not only joining a gym or becoming active again, but also changed their eating habits. We created a community within our funeral home

that helped encourage each other to push for goals as well as sustainable lifestyle changes that promote health and wellness. One of our team members lost over 65 pounds by changing his eating habits and making a daily effort to be active. Mr. Hernandez, Owner and Funeral director also unveiled a hashtag for the team to use; #jmgFit (Jersey Memorial Fit) to encourage the use of the hashtag on social media to show our physical activities, eating, and overall healthy living. The team certainly caught the bug and in total over 150 pounds were lost (never to be found again!) by the team. This does not include the impact our team member's healthy living had on their own family and friends, which was profound.



The effect this had on the team was not only life changing but had such an encouraging effect on the community. So many in the community would mention when they saw many of us of the change or how active we became by viewing our activities on Facebook. One person that noticed, was Rosemarie Rivoli of the Mayor's Health and Wellness Council in Old Bridge Township. She approached David Hernandez for advice on "an activity" for the council. One thing Mr. Hernandez has always wanted to do was run a race in Old Bridge. A meeting was arranged for preliminary planning of a 5k race. Mrs. Rivoli and Mr. Hernandez met with the Mayor's Office, Economic Development, Police, Fire, Cert, Parks and Rec to begin planning the 5k event. They decided to make it a health and wellness event that honored Hometown Hero's and all proceeds would be donated to Charity.

Mr. Hernandez oversaw the marketing, hand designed the finisher medals, and racer sign-up of the event while Mrs. Rivoli was in charge of the coordination with the government agencies, while both shared fund-raising duties. The goal was to raise \$5,000.00 and have 100 racers sign up. After some debate, and much persuasion the route was designed by Mr. Hernandez to go through the center of town and over the highest point of the township called, Beacon Hill, an old revolutionary War point that holds historical significance in America's fight for independence. We also decided to open up the event to a Health and Wellness Fair to promote local businesses that help residents with healthy choices. A website was used to allow for easy sign ups and race details at, <https://runsignup.com/Race/NJ/OldBridge/MayorsInauguralHealthWellness5KHonoringOurHometownHeroes>

The race would begin at 8am on March 30th, with the health and wellness fair to follow though 12PM. Each runner would receive a finisher medal and shirt, and the first 50 signups would receive a free "swag-bag".

By the day of the race, the Mayor's Inaugural Health & Wellness 5k Honoring Hometown Hero's had attracted over 500 racers, 40 fair vendors, numerous fire and police trucks on display, and over 300 spectators to support their family or set up along the route. Local Fire, police and first aid were on hand through the event, the race started with the presentation of the colors by the JR ROTC, the singing of the National Anthem, opening remarks by Mayor Henry, and great pre-race pump up by Mr. Hernandez himself (see video). Each runner received a chip to accurately calculate their time which allowed various times and placements to be recorded. Along the route many families were outside waving American flags and cheering for the runners. Mr. Hernandez had the honor of running with the American Flag through the entire course. As each runner crossed the finish line a large group of spectators cheered them on and were greeted by the Mayor who handed them their finisher medals and had the opportunity to replenish themselves with bananas and bagels (we love our bagels in NJ). The Health and Wellness Fair began as soon as the first runners finished and continued until 12PM.

We held special awards for the top three male and female awards, as well as age group top finishers, and the youngest boy and girl runners. In all the event raised over \$10,000.00 dollars going to charities in NJ and Boston for Veterans. It was such a success that Mayor Owen Henry stated, "The Hometown Hero's 5k made such an impact on the community and was so successful that before the event ended, we were already planning the next one." The Mayor's Economic Development Executive

Stephen Mamakas also commented by saying, “We are very lucky to have business owners like David Hernandez and Old Bridge Funeral Home who constantly think of the community first, because of business like these is why we have such a great town that is connected. We are so grateful for all of the volunteers, businesses, runners and spectators”

The entire funeral home staff volunteered from working the registration tables, to assisting park and rec in preparing the route, establishing the route, preparations and clean up. We are still amazed as is the entire Mayo’s office as to how well received the event was. Please click on the links below for a two one minute videos showing the event, the first a wrap-up video and the second a wrap-up slideshow. Over 75 Volunteer certificates were produced by the Township of Old Bridge for volunteers and student who volunteered their hours were recorded for community service.

We are so humbled and grateful to serve our community but to also be a part of the community. Not just as death care professionals but also as caring neighbors. This event created and started by a handful of our team choosing to live healthy, impacted our lives, or families, and our community.

#jmgFit

OB5K Wrap-Up Video: <https://vimeo.com/348237197>

OB5K Slideshow: <https://vimeo.com/348235408>

