

# Neighborhood Post

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## IN FOCUS

# Race for the Angels aims to help families

Bella's Angels helps kids dealing with lifelong illnesses.

By Michelle Plasecki  
Special to The Palm Beach Post

Bella Cavallo's 12 years have been daunting. She might be young, but she's been through more trials than most adults.

Consider this — she has had a feeding tube for 10 of her 12 years of life. She has had 19 surgeries, including an open-heart surgery, and this young girl was also told she would never walk, talk or eat.

Today she does it all. In fact, she will run the last mile of the Run for the Angels Relay Race, which starts at 9 a.m. Sunday at Abacoa Town Center in Jupiter.

The race benefits Bella's Angels, the organization that Bella's mom Kerry started to help families whose children are born with and diagnosed with CHARGE Syndrome or any other lifelong disability.

CHARGE, which Bella was diagnosed with at age 4, is a "recognizable pattern of birth defects that occurs in about one in every 9 to 10,000 births worldwide," according to the CHARGE Syndrome Web site.

"She (Bella) is truly the bravest person I know, and I am a better person for having been chosen to be her mother," said Kerry Cavallo.

"I honestly can't remember Bella ever complaining once about how hard it is for her ... There is nothing she thinks she



Daniel Martell, president and CEO of the Economic Council of Palm Beach County and Bella's Angels board member; Bella Cavallo; and Linda Neary, owner of Tri Run Bike.

cannot do or accomplish like her peers."

This year's event is expected to draw about 1,000 people because of the organization's newly formed board and the increased number of people working for the event, which is sponsored by several businesses, including Ryder, Palm Beach Kennel Club, Downtown at the Gardens, Florida Crystals and Florida Power and Light, said Daniel Martell, the event's chairman.

"Everything is new and fresh," said Martell, who is president of the Economic Council of Palm Beach County.

The goal is to raise about \$50,000 from this event and to raise awareness about Bella's Angels and CHARGE as well as the families who support and raise special-needs children.

Bella's Angels is a non-profit that assists families with medical costs

### IFYOU GO:

**What:** Run for the Angels

**When:** 9 a.m. Sunday

**Where:** Abacoa Town Center, Jupiter

**Cost:** \$250 for the corporate challenge, \$80 for a family and friends relay team and \$60 for a team of children under age 18

**Registration:** Online at [www.bellasangels.org](http://www.bellasangels.org), Tri Run Bike at 13975 U.S. 1 in Juno Beach or at the carousel at Downtown at the Gardens.

for special-needs children. It provides emotional support and helps cover costs for therapy, surgery co-payments and medical equipment needed to help a child live a more effective life, Martell said.

This is about helping people who just need it, he said.

This year, the organization will give more than \$75,000 to assist the organization's buddies, or families they support.

Since the organization was founded in 2007, Bella's Angels has assisted 12

families who have children with lifelong disabilities, according to Deborah Jaffe, the organization's executive director.

The organization also has a new initiative this year to establish a medical advisory team to select families who are good candidates for assistance.

Kara Koetter of Tequesta and her family have been receiving assistance from the organization, and she is grateful for the help.

Her son, Dalton, was diagnosed with Trisomy



Kerry Cavallo was inspired to found Bella's Angels by her daughter Bella, who was born with CHARGE Syndrome.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS

13, a genetic disorder often characterized by extra fingers and toes.

Koetter said that she was 20 weeks pregnant when she and her husband discovered the problem.

The couple was told, "They (children born with the disorder) don't have a life."

Dalton has endured several open-heart surgeries, and Koetter and her husband have to constantly watch their 2-year-old to ensure his central apnea doesn't stop him from breathing.

Without the help of Bella's Angels, she said they would be bankrupt because of the care that Dalton needs simply to survive.

"Bella's Angels has really given us some sense of normalcy in an abnormal life," she said.

When Koetter thinks about Dalton's future, she said she doesn't think further than tomorrow. She also focuses on making him happy.

"Bella's Angels has given us the chance to enjoy our son and the time he has here," she said.



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