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Racing for hope Local man to **run** Kids in Crisis triathlon in stepson's memory

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Since January, Robert Dixon has been swimming three miles, running 30 miles and biking almost 100 miles a week. He even rides his **bike** to work. Those countless hours of training will prove essential for the 57-year-old when he competes in the Kids in Crisis KIC It Triathlon, but the inspiration he summons from his late stepson, Dewitt Romig, will be just as important. "He was such an adventurous kid," says Dixon, a South Norwalk resident and vice president of advertising and communications at Conair in Stamford. "There was always some mountain he wanted to climb."

Dixon will participate in the June 29 triathlon not only to celebrate the life of his stepson, who was killed in a house fire in Greenwich nearly eight years

ago, but to honor a community nonprofit that helped the boy and thousands of other kids resolve their adolescent troubles.

"(Kids in Crisis) played an important role in helping Dewitt through his struggles," Dixon says. "He wasn't a bad kid, he just needed some guidance. Kids in Crisis helped him to set goals."

Created in 1978, the Cos Cob-based nonprofit provides free temporary shelter, counseling, medical care and educational support to children with a wide range of issues. Romig, a former Greenwich resident, stayed at Kids in Crisis twice when he was a teenager at the suggestion of his mother, Mary Stacy, to resolve family conflict. (Dixon declined to be more specific about the reasons for Romig's stay.)

Though Dixon says Romig's problems weren't dire, Kids in Crisis regularly assists children and their families with serious calamities, such as substance and domestic abuse, economic hardship, medical issues and homelessness. The organization has helped more than 80,000 children and their families since its inception.

"We're incredibly proud that this organization has existed and grown in the past three decades," says Sarah Duffy-Edwards, marketing director at Kids in Crisis. "But at the same time, it's sad that there's an increasing need for our services. We're here every year answering a greater need."

The organization and its supporters say that while Kids in Crisis addresses a variety of difficulties from individuals across the socio-economic spectrum, early prevention is the best way to stem any issue. Dixon contends that it was the early timing of his stepson's visits and subsequent counseling that helped sort out his problems before they became acute.

"Our motivation is to raise awareness," Dixon says. "The time to know about a resource is not when you're desperate - you should know about it ahead of time."

The triathlon includes a one-mile **swim** along West Beach followed by a 24-mile **bike** ride from shore through Stamford's business district and North Stamford, and a 6.2-mile **run** along Mill River and through downtown. More than a dozen of Dixon's friends and relatives will be there wearing "Just Dew-Itt" T-shirts.

"I think it's amazing what (Bob) is doing, it takes so much dedication," says Liz Romig, who designed the T-shirts. "On top of being such a great cause, Bob is doing this in my brother's memory, which means the world to myself and our family."

Much to his delight, Dixon has surpassed his fundraising goal of \$10,000 with donations from friends, family and business associates, including his boss, Lee Rizzuto, who contributed about half the funds Dixon has raised.

"It's tremendous when people who love and care about us are asked to help, and they give an unhesitating yes," Dixon says.

Funds collected at the triathlon will benefit many Kids in Crisis services, such as a 24-hour free crisis hotline; residential emergency shelter for infants, children and teens; and prevention programs like SafeTalk and TeenTalk.

"The financial issues every family faces in raising children, we also face as an agency," says Duffy-Edwards.

"Because our primary programs are free, fundraising is really critical for us." The nonprofit hopes to raise \$100,000 at the event.

Inspiration for the triathlon came from Chris Beers, a General Electric employee in Stamford, who four years ago participated in the New York City Triathlon with a group of colleagues to fundraise for Kids in Crisis. The organization hopes that if the event attracts enough participants this year - especially enthusiastic individuals like Dixon - they can make it even bigger next year.

"We're all really moved by Bob's commitment to Kids in Crisis," says Duffy-Edwards.

After graduating from the Harvey School in Katonah, N.Y., where he was captain of the lacrosse team, Romig planned to attend the University of Utah in 2001. He died Dec. 9, 2000. Dixon and Romig's family have channeled their sadness into supporting an organization that helped Romig find peace.

"It's a lot of grief, it doesn't leave you," Dixon says. "You can either mourn or try to celebrate his life."

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To register for the Kids in Crisis KIC Triathlon visit www.hartfordmarathon.com/foundationnew/calendar/stamford.htm (online registration ends Wednesday); go in person to Sportsplex, 49 Brown House Road, Stamford, Friday, 1-7 p.m. or Saturday, 1-5 p.m.; or call Kids in Crisis at 622-6556.

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