

Web posted Friday, August 6, 2004

Running for life

Frank Maier Marathon entrant credits running as a lifesaver

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JUNEAU EMPIRE

With 36 - soon to be 37 - marathons to her name, it could be said that Julia Froble lives for running.

Ask the 61-year-old Ohio resident about running, though, and she'll say she lives because of it.

Froble, in Juneau to run in Saturday's Frank Maier Marathon, had 15 years of marathons and triathlons behind her when, in April 1999, she nearly died in a freak training accident. She was hospitalized for months and underwent a long rehabilitation. But she emerged with a renewed devotion to the sport.

"What has encouraged me to continue being physically active is that the neurologist at the hospital said, 'If you hadn't been in such good physical condition, you'd be six feet under,'" Froble said.

"(Being active) saved my life. As long as I'm physically able, I will never stop swimming, biking and running."

Froble, on a quest to run a marathon in every state, heard about the Frank Maier Marathon from her niece, Ginny Cole. Cole, 45, works summers in Juneau for Holland America and will be running her first marathon on Saturday alongside her aunt.

They'll join more than 100 runners from Alaska and 13 other states, along with Canada and Japan, in the marathon and accompanying Douglas Island Half-Marathon.

The top marathon runners leave Savikko Park at 7 a.m. - slower runners can opt to start at 6 a.m. - and will follow an out-and-back along Douglas and North Douglas Highways to finish back at Savikko Park.

The half-marathon starts at 9 a.m. - 8 a.m. for slower runners - and will also follow a shorter out-and-back route on the same course as the marathon.



Living because of running: Julia Froble, 61, of Cuyahoga Falls, Ohio, left, credits her active lifestyle for saving her life after a freak training accident put her into a coma five years ago. She will run Saturday's Frank Maier Marathon with her niece, Ginny Cole, 45, who works summers in Juneau.

Brian Wallace / Juneau Empire

The records in the marathon are 2 hours, 31 minutes, 30 seconds for men, set last year by Juneau's Shawn Miller, and 3:19:04 for women, set in 1999 by Bridget Storm of Anchorage.

In the half-marathon, the men's record is 1:10:52, set by Ramon Colon Malave of Puerto Rico in 1996, and the women's record of 1:25:19 was set by Juneau's Merry Ellefson in 2001.

Froble, who lives in Cuyahoga Falls, near Akron, won't be aiming for records this weekend. Just finishing a marathon these days is a cause for celebration, and reflection.

She ran her first marathon, in New Orleans, at the urging of a friend. She finished in just over four hours, and was hooked. She also got involved in triathlons, completing nine Ironman events in Hawaii and another, particularly grueling Ironman-distance event (2.4-mile swim, 112-mile bike, 26.2-mile run) in the Canary Islands.

In April 1999, while cycling with a training partner in preparation for an Ironman qualifier, a Canada goose took flight into the path of Froble's bike and the collision sent her catapulting over the handlebars.

Froble, who suffered a traumatic brain injury and a broken clavicle, doesn't remember much of what happened. She fully regained consciousness two months later.

With the encouragement of friends, she got back into shape and in November 2000 she entered the Chicago Marathon. It took 6 1/2 hours, but she finished - and has been running two marathons a year ever since.

"Whenever I reach the finish line after recovering, I cry," she said. "I should have died, but it wasn't God's will. (While running) I pray, and I thank God for letting me be able to do this. ...

"I don't even worry about finishing in a quick time. My single goal is reaching the finish line."

Froble said she's looking forward to running with her niece, who has an interesting story of her own. Cole has lost 170 pounds over the past 15 years, and said her aunt has provided plenty of inspiration in preparing for the marathon.

"Aunt Julie was always my idol," Cole said. "I never would have thought it was possible to run a marathon. But with her, I always kept a positive attitude. She's always been very fit, a very wise woman who never gives up.

"I wouldn't be doing it if it weren't for Aunt Julie."

Race festivities begin at 5 p.m. tonight with a pre-race pasta feed at Chinook's Restaurant in the Goldbelt Hotel. For more information, see Sports in Juneau on Page B2 or look on the Web at <http://www.juneau.com/serr>.

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