

<http://www.dailyherald.com/article/20121023/news/710239942/>

Daily Herald

www.heraldextra.com

Article posted: 10/23/2012 7:46 AM

Cancer fight doesn't deter Wayne woman from running marathons

Cancer fight doesn't deter Wayne woman from running marathons



Ginna Podge of Wayne became a marathon runner after she was diagnosed with cancer 10 years ago. She will compete in the Chicago Ultra 50K Oct. 27.

Paul Michna | Staff Photographer



Witnessing the beauty of nature and the changing seasons has been one of the benefits of becoming a runner, Ginna Podge says.

Paul Michna | Staff Photographer

1 of 2

By Susan Dibble

Ginna Podge was into fitness, but she didn't become a marathon runner until after she was diagnosed with cancer 10 years ago. She's continued running through two recurrences of cancer, and attributes improved treatment along with the joy of running with keeping her in the race.

"When you finish a run, no matter what you're going through, you always feel better," she said.

The Wayne resident was 38 when she was diagnosed with non-Hodgkin lymphoma in 2002. She underwent standard radiation treatment that caused her to get sick, lose weight and lose her hair. But two years later, when a running club was forming at her fitness club, Podge decided to join, even though she wasn't sure she could run the planned distance of three miles.

"It was getting outside. It was starting something new," she said. "Whenever my heart started going faster and my blood started pumping, I just felt good. It was just a positive feeling I got every time I went out."

Podge started setting running goals instead of focusing on the cancer. She began training for a marathon in 2006, only to be sidelined by a leg fracture that year. She persevered to run in the Bank of America Chicago Marathon in 2007.

Since then, she's run in several marathons.

She's also participated in an Olympic triathlon and a Half Ironman this year. She ran the Chicago Marathon again this fall and will run just over 31 miles when she competes in the Chicago Ultra 50K along the lakefront on Oct. 27.

Podge, 48, said competing in a full Ironman that would include a 2.4-mile swim, 112-mile bike ride and marathon run might be a good goal for when she turns 50, but she takes one race at a time.

“If you get into a run and it’s not your day, you still have to enjoy it and be happy you’re just able to do it,” she said.

Cancer treatment

Podge kept running when her cancer first recurred in 2008. She participated in a clinical trial at Northwestern University Hospital and found the side effects from the drugs much less than with the standard radiation treatment.

“The day before my last (treatment) session, I actually ran a marathon,” she said.

Two years later in 2010, she qualified to run in the Boston Marathon, an event Podge calls her most memorable race.

“I started (running in marathons) and three years later I was running in the Boston Marathon. That’s a pretty good accomplishment, I think,” she said.

The cancer recently recurred when a lymph node appeared on the femur bone of her leg. Fearing that radiation would weaken Podge’s bones and prevent her from running, her doctor referred her to ProCure CDH Proton Therapy Center in Warrenville, a facility of Central DuPage Hospital. Podge underwent treatment five days a week for five or six weeks, completing it on April 19.

“April 29, I was able to be in another marathon,” she said.

Podge said the difference in treatment enabled her to keep running.

“The difference between treatment now and 10 years ago when I started is huge,” she said. “They’re trying to help everyone maintain their lifestyle whatever they’re doing.”

Dr. Patrick Sweeney, staff physician at ProCure’s Warrenville facility, said proton treatment has gained wider use in the past 10 years. Ten proton treatment centers are open in the United States, and more are under development, but the Warrenville facility is the only one in Illinois.

The photons in standard radiation cause additional damage because they must exit the tissue, he said. In contrast, protons can be used in a more limited dose that targets the cancer cells only.

“It is used with any patients when precision is important,” he said.

Sweeney said the Warrenville proton treatment center opened in 2010 and has treated 600 patients so far.

“They are more expensive because there are fewer, but the price is coming down,” he said.

Shared activity

Podge said she began triathlon training this year because she believes in the future long-distance running may become too hard on her legs. A 3-D graphic designer by profession who is employed in Chicago, Podge said she has a group in the city she runs, swims and bikes with during the week. The married mother of two adult children, she also runs with a son who lives in Chicago.

On weekends when she returns to Wayne, she runs with a group from Dick Pond Athletics store in Carol Stream on Saturdays. She estimates she trains an hour to an hour and a half weekdays and two to three hours on Saturday, giving herself breaks on Fridays and Sundays.

Podge started her marathon training with the Team in Training program of the Leukemia & Lymphoma Society and still helps out at its events. The social aspect of running is important, she said.

“You’re not miserable and working very hard. You’re with friends,” she said.

Podge said many of her fellow runners don’t know she’s had cancer, but she gladly shares her story with anyone who mentions that a loved one has been diagnosed. Otherwise, the runners talk about all kinds of things, or sometimes just share the run in silence, she said.

“It’s your time to get away,” she said. “Everyone has their issues.”

Ken Martin, an employee of Dick Pond in Carol Stream and a fellow runner, said Podge doesn’t let snow, cold or heat keep her from running the agreed-on distance.

“Ginna is an inspiration. She’s just very driven, motivated. She will work through anything,” he said.

“She’ll be tying up her shoes and going out with a group in the harshest of conditions.”

Podge adjusts her pace to accommodate other members of the group and doesn’t complain about what she’s been through, he said.

“She keeps that very private,” he said. “She doesn’t talk about cancer to gain sympathy.”