

Sneakers to Asphalt

Wildcats will run for good causes on Marathon Monday

Wednesday, April 15, 2015

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UNH students, grads and faculty members will contribute to the chorus of footfalls on Monday during the 119th running of the Boston Marathon. We asked a handful of them why they are running. Hearing their stories, we're confident we've discovered six of the more amazing individuals among the 30,000 athletes who will take to the streets of Beantown on Patriots Day.

From Hammock to Heartbreak Hill

So dedicated to the art of relaxation is **Theresa Conn '14 '15G**, that as a UNH undergrad she cofounded a club dedicated to it. Still going strong, this spring you'll find members of the Hammock Club literally hanging out across campus.

"If that's my legacy, that's pretty good," jokes Conn, a Billerica, Mass., native.

Knowing this, it may surprise you that someone so passionate about lounging has taken on one of the most taxing physical feats known to humankind. On April 20, Conn will run the Boston Marathon.

She's had her sights set on Boston since 2011 when she was on Cape Cod for a summer internship; her roommate was a runner in training for the Olympic trials.

"Seeing her passion, I decided to run a 5K," Conn says.

She trained for a half marathon the next year and ran it just two weeks after that fateful day in April 2013 when bombs went off at the Boston finish line.

"Being from the Boston area, and being in full training for the half, it affected me deeply," Conn says. "It was in the back of my head then to do Boston."



Update!

Since we published Sneakers to Asphalt, we've heard from many Wildcats who are also running Monday's marathon. See More Wildcats in the Race.

Since November Conn has been pounding the pavement four times a week to prepare, squeezing marathon training into an already intense schedule — she's in the one-year accelerated MBA program at UNH; she works part-time at the Memorial Union Building, and over spring break she and her MBA classmates traveled to China.

She's also been fundraising, bringing in \$5,300 so far for the Girl Scouts of Eastern Massachusetts, an organization near and dear to her heart. Conn was a scout from age six to 18 and attended Camp Maude Eaton in Andover, Mass., every summer. She says there, "I gained an appreciation of nature that directly led to my undergrad major in environmental conservation and sustainability." [Conn's marathon page](#)

Patient Partner



Steve Davis '69 with his late wife Ginger '69 in the Austrian Alps

Steve Davis '69 will run Boston for the fourth time this year. He's on the [Massachusetts General Hospital Pediatric Oncology team](#), and for the past three years, he's run "with" his MGH patient partner – a young boy undergoing treatment for leukemia. He finished those treatments this past summer, so on Monday Davis will run to celebrate his progress.

Davis discovered the MGH team shortly after he lost his wife [Ginger '69](#) to cancer in 2011. He had set up an endowment at his wife's behest to fund scholarships for MGH nurses studying to become nurse practitioners. It was during a casual conversation with an MGH development officer that he learned about the team.

He looks forward to mile 20, where the families of MGH patients and runners will assemble and cheer them on. "It's just before Heartbreak Hill," Davis says. "Hundreds of kids are there, cheering. It gets us through the final six miles."

The first year Davis ran Boston, his daughter was at mile 20 with her two children. "I looked up into a sea of yellow t-shirts and heard this yelp. It was my daughter. She ran down to where I was and we ran up Heartbreak Hill together. I will never forget that moment."

To be sure, it's been a tough winter to train; but Davis, who was a member of the Nordic ski team at UNH, used this winter's copious snowfall to his advantage, logging many miles of aerobic training on his skate skis.

Of this year's race, Davis says, "Everyone will finish; by hook or crook, we'll all get across the line." [Davis's marathon page](#)



Amanda McMeniman '99 high-fives her family at mile 21 of the Boston Marathon.

A Perfect Fit

Amanda Rich McMeniman '99 thinks everything happens for a reason. At UNH, she was on the indoor/outdoor track team, and she's remained an avid runner, even qualifying for and running the Boston Marathon four times. But last year, she was injured when she went to qualify and she didn't make the cut.

It turns out that not qualifying was a stroke of good fortune for McMeniman, who set out to find a charity to run for and discovered the [Ace Bailey Children's Foundation](#), the organization named for former Boston Bruin Garnet "Ace" Bailey, who was killed in the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2011.

The foundation funds Ace's Place, a large playroom for kids who are undergoing tough treatments at the Floating Hospital for Children at Tufts Medical Center in Boston. McMeniman will run for the foundation's marathon team on Monday, and she says it's the perfect fit.

"I'm from a huge hockey family," says McMeniman, a third-grade teacher whose husband played hockey in college and now works for the hockey industry. "We're also huge Bruins fans." When she learned that the foundation funded renovations to the neonatal intensive care unit at the hospital to make it more comfortable for parents of newborns in distress, she could relate even more, as she spent "countless hours" in a NICU when her youngest daughter was born prematurely.

All this is why the Hampstead, New Hampshire, resident jumped at the chance to join the team even though she would only have 10 weeks to train and fundraise. She hopes to raise \$5,000 by Marathon Monday.

“I see this connection lasting way beyond 4/20,” McMeniman says. [McMeniman's marathon page](#)

On Pace with Pierce

Randy Pierce '88 used to run the UNH homecoming race back in his days as a student of engineering. A lot has changed since then.



Randy Pierce '88 with his late guide dog Quinn

At the age of 22, just months after he graduated from UNH and started his first job, Pierce suffered from a neurological disease that, over the course of two weeks, robbed him of his vision.

Such an event might stop an average person in his tracks. But Randy Pierce is not ordinary.

Since his diagnosis and a subsequent bout of the disease, he has earned a second-degree black belt in karate; climbed 48 of New Hampshire's highest mountains — twice; completed a double-century bike ride; competed in a Tough Mudder competition, and finished a couple marathons. On Monday, he'll run Boston for [Team With A Vision](#) and

his own foundation, 2020 Vision Quest, which funds two organizations that support the visually impaired. And he'll run in honor of his late guide dog, Quinn, whom he credits with getting him back into the sport.

"When I got Quinn, I was coming out of a wheelchair ... balancing was a challenge. The more I walked with him, the more speed I gained, the more my brain healed, and then magic began to happen. We picked up the pace, and the dog began jogging. So I did, too."

The two continued jogging together, and Quinn served as a canine guide to Pierce in many 5K and 10K races, including the 2013 B.A.A. 5K, a race that ends on the same finish line as the Boston Marathon but the day before. Pierce recalls, "One day later the bombs went off."

In the days that followed, he says rather than focusing on the horrors, he thought about the helpers – the responders who, even when the second bomb went off, didn't break stride. "I vowed that I would run the 2014 Boston Marathon," Pierce says.

But then, another change. Quinn was diagnosed with cancer and passed away in January 2014.

Devastated, Pierce kept running. "It's important for me to run in his honor," he wrote in a [blog post](#) a few months after Quinn's death. Today, Pierce runs with human guides. He's run the Bay State Marathon and the Cox Providence Marathon; last December, he and guide Jose Acevedo were the first-place finishers in their division at the California International Marathon.

On Monday, Pierce's new guide dog, Autumn, will be on the sidelines of Boston to wag him on. [Pierce's 2020 Vision Quest](#)

Running RN

Jennifer Anstead '97 will run Boston for the fifth time next week. Like Steve Davis, she runs for the Massachusetts General Pediatric Oncology Clinic.

Her patient partner is a 7-year-old girl whose brain cancer has been in remission for about a year.

"The crowd for Boston doesn't ever really let you have a hard time," says Anstead, who is a nurse at Mass General. "But when I get tired I just think about why I'm running, think about the patients who are so young and don't know a life without being sick. I tell myself, whatever I'm experiencing right now will go away when I stop, but their pain will be with them for much longer."



Jennifer Anstead '97 (third from left) with other UNH alums training for the 2015 Boston Marathon.

At UNH, Anstead played rugby. She started running when the demands of her career made team sports a challenge to schedule.

Like Davis, she, too, looks forward to reaching the point on the course where the MGH family will be waiting and cheering. “It’s really emotional coming up to mile 20,” Anstead says. “It’s amazing. By the time you get there, the aches and pains, they’ve really set in. It’s a mental challenge. It’s certainly a physical challenge. Then you get there and it’s almost like anything that’s been bothering you, it just washes away. Everyone is cheering and so supportive. It just fills you up. When you leave mile 20, your tank is full.”

Anstead says while running for the pediatric oncology clinic is a worthy cause, “Someday I hope to never have to run for them. Someday I hope there are not enough kids in the clinic to go around.” [Anstead's marathon page](#)

Marathon: Check!



Denise Timmerman '99

Running a marathon has been on the bucket list of **Denise Timmerman '99** ever since high school, when she was on a small but successful cross-country team. She's run several 5Ks and half marathons since then — four halves last year alone — so when her father, a pastor, mentioned that the Hopkinton Community Covenant Church in Hopkinton, Mass., was looking for a runner for this year's Boston Marathon, she knew it was time to check it off the list. "My mileage is up; I'm getting older, now's the time," she says.

The resident of Stratham, N.H., has raised \$2,600 so far for the church's youth ministry fund. "All of the dollars go toward funding kids who want to attend summer camp at Camp Squanto near Keene, N.H." It's the camp both she and her father grew up attending, so "It's close to the heart." [Timmerman's marathon page](#)

What They Said

We asked each alumni runner what they do to pass the time on their long runs, how they get through extreme fatigue and whether they have any quirky runners' habits. Here's what they said.

Marathon moments

"Sometimes when I'm running a song will come into my head. The first year I ran Boston, about halfway through someone started playing a song that my late wife and I used to dance to in college. I got this big surge and passed about 25 people." —*Steve Davis*

Team Spirit

"I feel best when I'm running with my team. We're all at the same level. I can't imagine training without them." —*Theresa Conn*

Fighting Fatigue

"I run at about an 8-minute mile pace. There's a song — the Scotsman Clad in Kilt song — that's about four minutes long, so about a half mile. When I'm really tired, I sing the song and it makes the time pass." —*Randy Pierce*

Meditation in Motion

"While running, I don't listen to music or podcasts. I just run and let my mind go. Wherever my thoughts go, I go." —*Denise Timmerman*

Quirky Habits

"When I'm training, I'll see a license plate and try to divide down to the smallest number. "It's ridiculous. I'll do it with license plates and full phone numbers including area codes. It's one of the ways I occupy my mind." —*Jennifer Anstead*

Routine Landing

“When I step over the mat that tracks the runners, I always wave and sign ‘I love you’ because I know my family’s watching.” —*Amanda McMeniman*



Photo: Ryan McBride/The Sun of Lowell

Another alumnus in the race ...

Bryan Lyons '91 has been running for The Hoyt Foundation marathon team since 2008. Team Hoyt is best known for its founders, the father-son duo of Dick and Rick Hoyt, who have run the Boston Marathon for more than three decades – Dick pushing his son Rick in a custom wheelchair. This year, Lyons will assume a role of honor on the team; he'll take over for Dick, who retired from marathoning last year after his 32nd Boston Marathon pushing Rick. Lyons told The Sun he was shocked to have been asked and

he's honored to fill Dick's big shoes.

[Read article](#)

Are you running this year's marathon?

Are you a UNH alum, student, faculty or staff member who is running the marathon on Monday? Let us know so we can add your name to this compilation. Send your full name and year of graduation to unh.today@unh.edu.

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