

News & Observer – North Raleigh Section

Wednesday, Feb. 15, 2012

Exercise benefits hook beginning runners

By Teri Saylor

If Tracey Micham has always hated to exercise, then why is she planning to run the Disney's Princess Half Marathon at Walt Disney World in Florida on Feb. 25?

She's running it for her 6-year-old niece, Annalisse, whose nickname is "Princess," and who has cancer.

She's running it with two of her sisters – they'll be tackling a half marathon for the first time in their lives.



Tracey Micham, left, and Lou Ann Bakolia jog on the Lake Lynn Trail as a way to cool down after a training run.

And mostly, she is running it for her own health and well-being.

"A little over two years ago I went to the doctor for a check-up, and I was sad over the fact that my niece had cancer," Micham, 46, said. "I saw a brochure advertising personal training with Lou Ann Bakolia and signed up with her."

An emphatic non-exerciser, Micham experienced the mood-lifting effects of training almost immediately and began craving more.

So she took up running in May 2009 with a beginners' running group that Bakolia started at Lake Lynn in North Raleigh. Starting slowly and mostly walking, Micham gradually built speed and endurance and registered for a half marathon in Myrtle Beach in February 2010.

Runners have a tendency to obsess over the weather, worrying about heat stroke if it is too hot and hypothermia if it is cold and rainy. But runners in Myrtle Beach that year were not prepared for the 4 inches of snow that fell overnight and caused race organizers to cancel the marathon and half marathon.

Micham and others in Bakolia's running group who had been training for months were crushed.

"I was so disappointed," Micham said. "I didn't want to run in the snow, so I went home."

Rather than give up, she registered for the Tobacco Road Half Marathon the following month and completed it in 2:15.

"Lou Ann pushed me. I loved running the race, and I felt so good," Micham said.

Micham now has four half marathons under her belt.

Bakolia, 54, has been running since she was 21 years old. A computer programmer who went into sales, she relied on the sport to stay in shape, relax and relieve stress.

She ran her first marathon in Raleigh in 2000. In 2008, at age 50, Bakolia became eligible to run in the Boston Marathon with a qualifying time of 4:02.

"That was a great experience and one of the highlights of my life," she said. "I finished the Boston Marathon in 4:05, which re-qualified me for the next one."

Bakolia decided it was time to share her love of running with others.

"I was still on a Boston high in 2009, and I decided to turn running into a business to help other people get fit," she said.

She became certified through the American College of Sports Medicine, the Road Runners Club of America and USA Track and Field and launched Off to Run.

John Goodie is a believer. He joined Bakolia's program after realizing how out of shape he was.

A former power lifter, Goodie, 51, visited Pisgah Forest in the North Carolina mountains and discovered a serious lack of endurance.

"I had achieved a raw bench press of 450 pounds, a squat of 485 pounds and a dead lift of 505 pounds," he said. "I also had competed as a Master in the Amateur Athletic Union."

But Goodie was also a pack-a-day smoker, and needed to lose 50 pounds.

When he started running in 2008, he couldn't go for more than five minutes without stopping. His build-up has been gradual. Less than a month after he started running, he stopped smoking.

Next on his agenda is a series of races in 2012, building up to his first marathon in Richmond in November. “My long term goal is to run ultra-marathons, namely the Umstead 100 Mile Endurance Run,” he said.

Those words make Bakolia smile.

“I love it when I see that people I helped have become runners,” she said. “It makes me feel good to see them out running on their own.”

Micham and Goodie have caught the fever.

“I never thought I’d enjoy exercise so much,” Micham said. “When I first went out to run, I tied a jacket around my waist to cover my booty, even though it was so hot outside. I remember seeing other women in shorts and thought I could never wear those. When I finally got my first pair, I realized they look good.”

Goodie has seen tangible benefits too.

“Running and exercise have changed my life,” Goodie said. “In addition to the obvious health improvements and slow weight loss, I have an easier time hiking in the mountains now and enjoy more outdoor activities.”

The two have left negativity and regrets behind, and have learned to stay motivated.

“Sometimes it feels like work, or you get uncomfortable breathing hard or you get tired. But you learn to persevere through the hard parts and end up feeling like a million bucks afterwards,” Goodie said.

It is a feeling that is priceless.

- Want to run? The days are getting longer, and spring races are blooming. It’s time to shake off the winter doldrums, lace up the running shoes and hit the trails. If you are new to running or just haven’t jogged in a while, Lou Ann Bakolia, a personal trainer, offers these tips.
- Be consistent: Run at least three days a week for 30-45 minutes or more, and don’t let two days pass without running.
- Progression: Don’t expect to get in shape in one week. Start slowly and don’t increase your total mileage by more than 10 percent a week. If you get hurt, take time off to heal before going back out.
- Nutrition: Eat a balanced diet and stay hydrated. After running, try taking in a combination of carbohydrates and protein to help replace muscle glycogen and repair muscles.
- Cross-training: Train in other ways besides running. Swimming, cycling, yoga, Pilates and weight training complement running.
- Attitude: Practice positive thinking. Negative thoughts can slow you down. Your best running occurs when you find your zone.