

Running fills void after addiction

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For Jack Beck, a Bismarck-Mandan runner living in recovery from drug addiction, the herculean commitment to stop drugs is built upon a foundation of friends and family who support him as well as his newfound friend: running.

Beck started his running habit in short order after quitting drugs to fill the void he suddenly faced.

"Before I quit, my whole day revolved around the drugs. When I stopped, anxiety crept in and I knew right away that I needed something in place of the drugs," said Beck, who tried support groups, such as AA, but didn't find that "something" he needed to stay sober.

That's when Dave Reich, South Central District Judge, suggested Beck try running. Reich is founder of a group called Runners Against Destructive Decisions, or RADD, designed to help community members trying to break the cycle of addiction.

Beck accepted the judge's invitation and showed up for RADD's Saturday morning run. Beck covered 2 miles that first day and was exhausted and yet hooked. Though the work of covering those 2 miles was uncomfortably hard, the sense of accomplishment it gave kept Beck coming back for more.

For Beck, who struggled through 25 years of addiction, losing nearly everything, becoming a runner gave him a much-needed new identity. He is now Beck the runner, a man who has reconnected with family and friends and uses running to reduce his anxiety, ease his stress and find peace.

Addiction is a fierce disease that has the power to strike anyone anywhere. National statistics suggest at least one in 10 U.S. citizens suffers from addiction. What makes this chronic disease worse than others, such as heart disease and diabetes, is that addiction sufferers not only have to face the consequences of the disease, they also face the stigmatization society imposes.

Before we jump to stereotyping where addiction lives, know this: Most addiction sufferers are employed. Persons living in the throws of addiction and persons living in recovery are our neighbors, our coworkers and our families.

Imagine a community that treats addiction as the chronic disease that it is rather than a shameful choice and imagine how much more effective we could be at solving this devastating illness if we worked together.

Using races as a focal point, Beck has completed a handful of 5K (3.1 miles) and 10K runs (6.2 miles) and two half-marathons (13.1 miles). He trained for and ran the Kroll's Diner Half Marathon in September to celebrate two years of sobriety.

I knew Beck had crossed over to the true, partially nutty runner mentality when I asked him how the race went and he said he was one minute off his goal time. Never mind he beat his previous best by several minutes, he said he struggled the last 2 miles and was disappointed.

"I had a good pace going up to that point, and then it just got really, really tough," he said.

The family friendly 5K fun run/walk is 10 a.m. at the State Capitol Grounds. Registration begins at 9 a.m. A short post-race ceremony will feature community leaders speaking about addiction and what we can do to solve this problem.

Keeping with the holiday theme, refreshments include hot chocolate and Christmas goodies.

For more information, go to bismarcksantarun.com.

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