

# Beyond Limits

## Some NYC Marathoners face greater challenges

By Rich O'Malley

STAFF WRITER

Some people think running 26.2 miles in November through the streets of New York City with thousands of other competitors and millions of people watching is a challenge. And for most people, it is.

But imagine running a marathon with a prosthetic leg. Or taking on the course in a wheelchair. Those are an even bigger challenge, the kind more than 300 people with various disabilities will tackle Sunday in the New York City Marathon.

"The challenge of being disabled gives you focus and makes you mentally tough for endurance events," said Lori Penesis, 32, of Flushing.

Penesis lost her left leg below the knee to cancer when she was 18. In the years since, she has learned to live with her prosthetic leg in what she calls "an ongoing process." In fact, she made the transition so well that she held national records in the Paralympics in the 100- and 200-meter races until last year.

Sunday, however, she will be a helper rather than a runner. Penesis will be a volunteer from the New York City Outward Bound Center and assist an Achilles Track Club participant in completing the marathon. Achilles is a non-profit group founded in 1983 by Dick Traum. Its main goal is to help people with disabilities to run.

Penesis will join her partner at the halfway point in the race and run the final 13.1 miles with that person, assisting in whatever way she can. Volunteers are paired with participants of similar paces. Penesis has trained for her half-marathon mission and hopes to one day complete the marathon herself, but only after she has been "very well trained to do it."

"Running has made me a better person," Penesis said. "As a physics and mechanical-engineering person, it used to be me, my computer and my equations. But after I started running, I found I love to work with people."

Penesis is now a field instructor with Outward Bound and works at Eastern Mountain Sports in Carle Place, combining her love of helping and her love of the outdoors.

"Helping whoever I'm paired with will be very similar to my instructor role; to run with somebody to the finish and be there with them for this challenge. It's neat. I'm really looking forward to it."



Newsday Photo / Sundé Woods

Lori Penesis, who will help an Achilles Track Club runner complete Sunday's race, plays catch with her dog outside her Flushing home.

Penesis is one of the more than 500 volunteers who are looking forward to their assignments.

"We started with six people running in 1983, and we'll have 325 people from 47 countries in 1999," said Traum, who himself uses an artificial leg. "The best thing is just having them enjoy the sport."

Another of Achilles' participants, and one of its biggest success stories, is Helene Hines of Lido Beach, who has multiple sclerosis. The 52-year-old mother of two has run 27 marathons in the past 10 years, but this time around, she'll be trying something different.

"I'll be more worried about blowouts than hydration or carbs this time," Hines says.

She will be trekking the course in a handbike, a bike/wheelchair hybrid, assisted by volunteer Arthur O. Sulzberger Jr., publisher of the New York

Times, who will have to in-line skate the course to keep pace with Hines. After the marathon last year, Hines' MS-related vertigo became so bad that she was not able to run — or even walk without a cane — this year. She also cannot use a regular wheelchair for the race because her vertigo wouldn't allow her to lean forward as she would need to do. So Hines will use an arm-cranking method of propulsion to take her through the five boroughs.

"I found that the 110th Street hill is much harder pushing [uphill in the handbike] than running," Hines said. "People see you on the downhill and you're going pretty fast and they look at you like 'Oh, that's unfair,' but they should get in that chair and try to push it."

Hines hopes to finish Sunday's marathon in two hours flat, "if everything goes right."

She added that this will be the first year that wheelchair and handbike participants will not be stopped at the Queensboro Bridge and at the entrance to Central Park to wait for the top runners to pass first.

"It will be an actual wheelchair race for the first time," said Hines, who has been training with her handbike since July.

Hines also will handbike through the streets of Philadelphia and Boston in those cities' respective marathons later this year. She will also attempt some "ultras," races longer than marathons.

"It's absolutely amazing what your body can do," said Hines, who is a physical-education teacher. "You cross that finish line and it's one more step that you know you can do. It's not 'Can I do it?' at that point, but 'What can I do next?'"

## Hikers Step Up to Help, Heal

Employees of the city Department of Environmental Protection and Department of Transportation yesterday hiked five miles through Corona and Flushing Meadows-Corona Park in memory of DEP worker Christopher Postiglione. The proceeds of the first-ever "Hike for Health" will benefit United Cerebral Palsy of Queens.

Postiglione, 30, of Wantagh, a member of the DEP's Bureau of Water Sewer Operations, died Jan. 21 at New York Hospital Medical Center of Queens — 10 days after being struck in a hit-and-run accident while on the job.

About 80 people hiked from DEP offices at 59-17 Junction Blvd. in Corona to the park, circled the Unisphere, and walked back to their starting point. The

walk raised \$15,000, said Maryann McAleer, director of development for United Cerebral Palsy of Queens.

No one has been arrested in connection with the accident, and rewards totaling \$50,000 are being offered for information leading to the arrest and conviction of the person responsible. Police said Postiglione was hit by a light metallic-red Toyota Camry traveling eastbound on the Horace Harding Expressway at 9:15 a.m. Jan. 11. The vehicle had extensive damage to the windshield and right front fender, and the driver was believed to be a young male.

Anyone with information about the accident can call the confidential police hotline at 800-577-TIPS.

— Patrice Dickens



Newsday Photo / Ken Sawchuck

The Unisphere in Flushing Meadows-Corona Park was the midpoint of yesterday's 5-mile "Hike for Health."