

Don Supinski, was quadriplegic who completed NYC marathon

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Plain Dealer Reporter

OLMSTED FALLS — Don Supinski, the first person to complete the New York City Marathon without the use of arms or legs, died Tuesday at Southwest General Health Center in Middleburg Heights.

Supinski, 46, was a quadriplegic who drove his powered wheelchair over the 26-mile course in 1997 by pressing his head against the headrest and shifting gears with his cheek. Now a group of quadriplegics calling themselves "Don's Team" participates in the race each year.

They were organized by his sister, Mary Bryant, a New York City model who also is a marathon runner. She said that when she ran alongside the team in the annual race Sunday, spectators continually called Supinski's name.

"When we were running up Seventh Ave., the crowd kept yelling, 'Don, Don, Don,'" she said.

Supinski had already been honored for his upbeat personality and perpetual smile.

He was paralyzed about 30 years. America's Athletes with Disabilities, a national consortium of disabled-sports organizations, issued a citation for "unparalleled leadership to all athletes with disabilities." His sister has produced an hour-long documentary about him called "Don's Story: The Smile of An Angel."

Supinski was born in Cleveland. He was in his first year when doctors discovered a cyst on his brain. A shunt that was installed led to constant medical care over the rest of his life. When he was 16, he fell and crashed



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Don Supinski inspired his sister Mary Bryant, even before he rolled alongside her in the New York Marathon.

into a china cabinet while running through his dining room and suffered a paralyzing broken neck.

But his spirit remained intact.

"Everybody keeps looking at the dark side of things. I do the opposite. I look at the bright side," he once told a reporter.

He urged his sister to become a model and now she works for leading designers through the Ford agency in New York. He motivated her to take up running to stay in shape, and she has completed seven marathons.

She, in turn, got him to participate with her in the Revco Cleveland 10-kilometer race and later in the marathon. He did it despite undergoing surgery 85 times. His parents, Nellie and Bernard, committed themselves to care for him at home rather than put him in a nursing home. They moved from their Middleburg Heights house to a condominium in Olm-

sted Falls to make the job easier.

In addition to his parents and sister, Supinski's survivors include brothers, Bernard M. of Cleveland and Joseph A. of Attleboro, Mass., and sisters, Carolyn Sotomayer of Brook Park and Barbara Simoncic of North Olmsted.

Services will be at 10 a.m. tomorrow at St. Mary of the Falls Catholic Church, 25615 Bagley Rd., Olmsted Falls.

Memorial donations may be made to the Achilles Track Club, 42 W. 38th St., New York, N.Y. 10018.

Arrangements are by the Chambers Funeral Home of Cleveland.

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