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Story

September 22, 2005 - Volume XIII, Issue 38

Hungarian firefighters join NYC's Achilles project

MAJOR General Péter Bende, Chief Fire Officer of Budapest, has announced that Hungarian firefighters will participate in a volunteer initiative which helps disabled people to compete in sports.

Hungary became the first country whose firefighters were invited to join the American Achilles project - which promotes partnerships between firefighters and the disabled - during a visit to Budapest by Achilles Director, Mary Bryant, and Fire Chief Dan Daly, both from New York.

According to a press release issued by the US Embassy, Achilles has been using volunteers to help the disabled improve mobility in New York since 1983. Firefighters have been volunteering over the past 18 months. "Last year, more than 300 New York City Firefighters volunteered to assisted the disabled during the November NYC Marathon. Sixteen of them were wounded war heroes, and everyone finished the 42K distance. With Hungary in the lead, they [the firefighters and their less able partners] will become a model for other countries to follow," the press release said.

The disabled members who sign up to belong to Achilles decide with their volunteers on a local race to participate in, usually a 5K or 10K road race. As they increase their success and ability, reports will be made to the headquarters in New York City.

Next spring, under the direction of Achilles, invitations will be made to individuals with a disability and their volunteers to represent Hungary in the 42K ING New York City Marathon on November 5, 2006.

The Achilles Track Club is a worldwide organization that encourages people with all kinds of disabilities to participate in running with the general public. "Running is accessible to all, inexpensive, it breaks down barriers between disabled and mainstream participants, and enhances health," explained Bryant, herself a cancer survivor.

"People, who had difficulty negotiating the distance between light poles, often wind up competing in marathons."

Achilles includes all types of disabilities, such as visual impairment, stroke, cerebral palsy, paraplegia, arthritis, amputation, multiple sclerosis, cystic fibrosis, cancer, traumatic head injury, and organ transplant. Runners participate with crutches, in wheelchairs, on prostheses and without aids.

Founded in 1983 in New York City, Achilles has expanded into chapters across the United States and more than 100 chapters in 63 countries world wide, including Norway, Mongolia, Canada, Japan, Ecuador, Bulgaria, Colombia, Russia and South Africa.

Other programs in conjunction with different organizations provide eye surgery for blind runners, below-the-knee prostheses, and/or wheelchairs for Achilles members.

www.achillestrackclub.org

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