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HuffPost Greatest Person Of The Day: Dr. Dick Traum Inspires Disabled Veterans, Athletes

Dr. Dick Traum has competed in multiple marathons, run with former President Bill Clinton and inspired thousands to lead more active lifestyles -- and he's done it all on one foot.

Traum, who had to have one of his legs amputated after being crushed between two cars at a gas station when he was 24 years old, has spent decades competing in marathons and inspiring other disabled athletes -- including recently-disabled veterans -- to do the same. After being the first amputee to finish a marathon (New York's, in 1976), he went on to compete in dozens of races, both on foot and in a hand-crank wheelchair after replacing the knee in his "good leg," as he calls it.

As the founder of [Achilles International](#), Traum supports disabled athletes and hosts events in 70 countries. Traum told The Huffington Post that he believes about 10,000 people have been involved with Achilles.

"We're giving people an opportunity to achieve," Traum said. "When one achieves it sets off the 'Well, if I can do this, I can probably do that too' response. It improves the level of aspiration." He also said the community aspect of the organization is great for the athletes: "When people come together it creates a cohesive group and makes everything a little better."

The organization facilitates local chapters and races, including marathons such as the ING New York City Marathon and Hope & Possibility 5 Mile Runs, which the likes of Prince Harry of Wales, Cindy and Megan McCain and Heather Mills have participated in.

Another key facet of Achilles is the Freedom Team, which Traum founded after visiting the Walter Reed Army Medical Center in 2004 and recruiting a team to compete in a New York race. "I'd ask recently-wounded veterans if they'd be running our Hope & Possibility 5-miler, and they'd look at me like, 'What are you talking about? I can't even walk,'" Traum said. "Then we'd show them the hand-crank and they'd get into the chair and it was like a whole new life."

Seven years later, the program has worked with over 1,000 recently-disabled veterans and the Freedom Team participates in a marathon tour of 15 races each year across the United States.

When asked what difficulties Achilles faces in carrying out its mission, Traum said that funding is of the essence: "It's hard because it's expensive to train these athletes, so raising funds is always the most difficult aspect of our work."

This Sunday, athletes from Achilles will be taking part in the Nautica New York Triathlon. One athlete, Lt. Dan Crossen, is a former Navy Seal who lost both of his legs in Afghanistan in September 2009. Just two years later, he will be competing in the race that includes a one-mile swim in the Hudson, a 26-mile bike leg and a six-mile footrace through Central Park.

In trying to understand how long Traum has been inspiring amputees and other disabled athletes, it helps to remember the story of [Terry Fox](#), a Canadian man who ran two-thirds of the way across Canada on one leg to raise money for cancer research. Fox credited the inspiration for his awe-inspiring trek to a magazine article about Traum. The year was 1977.

If the nearly 35 years Traum has been active in these efforts are amazing, it's even more heartening to learn that he still competes.

Traum, who said his Ph.D from NYU's Stern School of Business in industrial psychology, management and human resources qualifies him as a "behavioral scientist," is hardly slowing down.

He completed the Boston Marathon in 1 hour and 47 minutes, which he said puts him at the level of some of the veterans on the Freedom Team.

For information on how you can help Achilles International, please visit their [website](#).

Note: This article originally referred to the Hope & Possibility Runs as "Hope & Promise" runs. The error has been corrected.

Dick Traum Running With President Clinton

