Runners Give Credit To Sports Store

By Eric Vo
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Caroline Bedard-Noyer “still gets emotional” as she remembers crossing the finish line of the first 5K race she ran in its entirety. “The first time I did it all by myself without any walking was last November,” said Bedard-Noyer, 45, of Wethersfield. “When I get to the last curve I still had juice in me.”

In the past, she finished the 3.3-mile course by doing a run-walk interval — something she learned after signing up for a training program at Fleet Feet Sports, a specialty running store at 1003 Farmington Ave., West Hartford. The store offers a number of 10-week training programs, such as a 5K, 10K, half and full marathon. The programs are for people of all abilities. The coaches tell runners that they can walk if they need to, said Paul Lawery, 63, of New Britain. “I could remember where I started from,” Bedard-Noyer said. “I could barely run a minute and a half... For my first race, I had to walk a little bit... [But] I never felt like a failure.”

Bedard-Noyer has come a long way since her training began in 2018. She finished a number of races — because of a healthier diet and “challenging” her body. Bedard-Noyer has lost over 30 pounds.

Still, finishing the race in November was “bigger than her weight loss,” she said. “I’m proud of what I’ve become.”

It was a long journey, but she credits two people for motivating her: Stephanie Bixby, co-owner of Fleet Feet Sports, and Rich Dillon, coach for the training programs. “I knew I had someone that was proud of something I was doing,” Bedard-Noyer said. “Now, knowing they were there for me has been a really big plus for my motivation.”

The coaches aren’t “like truck coaches,” who yell at runners, said Bedard-Noyer, 46, of West Hartford. “They’re just people who love running and you get the sense that they care about how you’re doing,” she said.

Jewett also has overcome her own challenges. Two years ago, after completing two 5K training programs, she woke up and “had spasms down [her] arm” and a “feeling [she] couldn’t get rid of.” A doctor told her a disc in her neck had herniated, she said. And she was told she could never run again — a diagnosis she found “devastating.”

But Jewett was determined to keep running. “Two weeks after surgery, she began training for the O’Hartford 5K. Immediately after that, she began training for a 10K,” she said.

Defying the odds of a medical diagnosis is something Lawery can relate to. He was diagnosed with lupus several years ago — an autoimmune disorder in which the body’s immune system attacks healthy tissue — and prostate cancer earlier this year.

He found refuge in running. “If he didn’t get out and run, he wouldn’t feel good for the rest of the day, he said, so when he was told not to run for 10 weeks after surgery, it’s no surprise he did the opposite.”

“Instead of running a little bit, I was running and it took a lot out of me,” he said. “I told [the doctor] I was going to go to the Iron Horse [half-marathon] in Simsbury... I’m going to do it even if it takes me a whole two hours.”

And that’s exactly what he did — after training two days a week for two weeks, he finished the Anista Brookstone Half Marathon at Lawery’s West Hartford Uterdow, and every household eligible for assistance.

Winter Heating Assistance Sign-Up Under Way

Submitted by Jason M. Natolls
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It’s the dog days of summer, so you may not be thinking about the coming winter heating season. But with full fall right around the corner, phone lines are open at the Community Renewal Team for people to call and make appointments to receive financial assistance with winter heating.

This year’s start to the energy season also comes with a cool way to beat the (current) heat—a chance to win one of two $200 stickers from the window air conditioning units donated by the Connecticut Energy Industry Businesses. All customers who complete an application for heating assistance by Aug. 31 will be entered into a drawing for one of two window air conditioning units (up to $5500 each) donated by local vendors.

Customers using all types of heating fuel—electric, natural gas, oil, kerosene, wood and propane—must be eligible for assistance. Both returning and new customers, including recently laid-off residents, are encouraged to call and make an appointment to see an intake specialist.

The number to call to make an appointment or to get more information is (860) 560-5800, and operators are available from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. Monday through Friday. Documents needed to apply for heating assistance include the following:

- Social Security Number and date of birth for all household members
- Current rent or mortgage statement
- Utility bill in name of a household member over 18
- Per oil, kerosene, wood or propane: Name of fuel company
- Proof of current gross income (pay stubs, bank statements) for all household members for four weeks prior to application date
- Documentation for Social Security and other monthly benefits, such as bank statements
- Current statements for checking, savings, credit union accounts, stocks, bonds and CDs

Last year, CERT gave out energy assistance payments to more than 27,000 Connecticut households despite the mild winter. In years with the largest number of applicants, CERT has given out payments to 55,000 households.

Expanded income guidelines and benefits for these recently laid off have made even more households eligible for assistance. Based on last year’s figures, a two-person household may qualify with yearly income up to $42,688, while a household of four may qualify up to $49,276.

Families and individuals facing recent layoffs are encouraged to apply. Income eligibility is determined based on gross earnings from the four weeks preceding your intake appointment. After a layoff or reduction in hours, families who were previously eligible may qualify.

For more information or to make an appointment, call (860) 560-5800.

Community Renewal Team Inc. is the designated Communities Action Agency for Middlesex and Hartford counties and is the largest nonprofit provider of human services in Connecticut.

CERT’s programs include Head Start, Meals on Wheels, energy assistance, supportive housing and shelters, and many others, serving people in more than 60 cities and towns in both our core catchment area and throughout Connecticut.