

The Runner Spotlight

Sometimes, finding time to run is more challenging than the run itself. It is a common problem shared by many runners. Often, runners compete with schedules and commitments to enjoy a run. Yet, somehow they find or make the time. Karen Zeplin is an example of a runner successfully making every effort to find that time. Despite four children, working, volunteering, and numerous other activities, she is an avid accomplished runner.

Karen leads a busy life like many people, and like many runners, tries hard to embed running into her busy life. In fact, her belief is “No excuses! Make a plan and just do it.” She does.

Karen enjoys the satisfaction and relaxation from her runs. “I lead a very hectic life and running reduces my stress. I have four children between the ages of two and thirteen. I work part time and volunteer for numerous activities. Running tones me down so I can handle everyday pressures with much more finesse. Milk spills do not seem as bad or continuous after a run. I feel like I am a better wife and mother because of my running. I find it gives me energy and builds my tolerance and patience with other people. It may seem selfish, but it isn’t. The benefits far outweigh the commitment and I know my family appreciates it, too!”

Born in Philadelphia, Karen attended St. Hubert’s High School and later earned a Bachelor’s degree in Nursing from Gwynedd Mercy College in 1982. Married in 1983 to Vincent Zeplin Jr., they lived in Harrisburg and later Philadelphia for several years. When Vincent enrolled in the Illinois School of Optometry in 1986, they moved to Chicago. Upon Vincent’s graduation in 1990 and a year after the birth of their oldest son, Vincent, they moved back to Harrisburg. Karen’s remaining

three children - Andrew (10), Joey (5), and Karina (2) were born in Harrisburg.

Karen had been running long before they moved to Chicago, but continued running in Chicago albeit short distances up and down the lakeshore drive. Running began for Karen in Philadelphia during her college days. “I started running in college for stress reduction and fitness. I completed short distances normally about four miles but did complete a half marathon and a ten-miler during those days I wasn’t running competitively because I was really running for my health. My mother was a victim of a heart attack and other family medical history worried me. I know you can’t change genetics but what I could do was relieve stress and improve my physical conditioning and that’s exactly why I started running. After Andrew was born in 1992, I entered a local 5K and placed in my age group. After that I become hooked.”

After permanently settling in Harrisburg, Karen joined HARRC in 1994. She enjoys being a member although her schedule prevents her from attending many HARRC events. She does participate in the Summer Series and the occasional Sunday club run. “I continue to be a club member to stay informed about HARRC events, see results of past events, and to learn about fellow runners.”

Karen continues to run for the same reasons she started - a strong family history of heart disease and stress reduction. As a registered nurse at Pinnacle Health, Karen knows the value of exercise. “I do every thing I can to avoid heart problems and running is one of them. Unfortunately, you can't change your genetics but I know from my nursing experience that almost every clinical treatment includes some form of exercise. I know I am doing the right thing by staying active.”

Friends are an inspiration to Karen and her running. She enjoys having someone

she can trust to meet her at all hours of the day for a run. “I find the long runs just fly by when I run with a friend and I really enjoy having someone I can share the solution to all the world’s problems!”

Karen runs about 30-40 miles per week. “I run 5 days a week and do one long run of 13-20 miles per week. I run in every type of weather except ice. I even have a treadmill at home for those times when I can’t get out of the house.” Karen prefers an early morning run to start her day but squeezes a run in whenever she can. On days she works or has full day ahead of her, she will run at 5:30 in the morning. “Licia White and I often meet at that time to use the treadmill. I actually start earlier than 5:30 and normally I am finishing my run about the time Licia shows up. As I finish, Licia jumps on the treadmill to get her run; it works great for both of us. We each get our run, we visit, and I eliminate the need for a sitter.” Karen runs at the Lower Paxton Friendship Center when her children are involved in the Center's activities, and a jogging stroller guarantees a run and time with daughter, Karina.

For years, Karen has been an integral part of the Run for 65 Roses, an annual event that benefits the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation. Karen became involved with this event because of her good friend Lisa Stokes. “Lisa and I met at a 10K many years ago. Her one daughter, who is one day older than Andrew, has Cystic Fibrosis. We wanted to organize an event where the proceeds would benefit the Cystic Fibrosis foundation. I am fortunate to have four healthy children and wanted to help in some way. My favorite part of this event is to watch all the children, especially the ones with cystic fibrosis giving it their all to complete the run. They truly are an inspiration.” Karen and Lisa are expecting another great turnout on August 2nd when the Run for 65 Roses is held in Hershey. In

addition to a 5K run, the event will include a one-mile walk, and a kids run called “Run for the Rosebuds.”

Karen has not had any profound moments through running or about running, but she did have this story to share that she called ‘bizarre.’ As part of her training recently, the plan called for a 20-mile run. Unfortunately, the day scheduled for her 20-miler was also the day 5-year-old son Joey awoke with a nasty stomach virus. Karen knew she had to complete the run that day or it was not going to happen. She could not let that happen. Scheduled to work the next day and unable to leave Joey with his older brother at home vomiting, Karen knew she could delay the run or it would not happen. She did what she felt was her only chance to complete the long run, so unbelievably; she completed the 20-miler on her treadmill. While her 13 year-old son kept a watchful eye on his younger brother in another room, Karen attacked the treadmill. Up until this point in her running life, Karen had not run beyond 14 miles on a treadmill. She said the first two hours were fine and the television, VCR, and a head set alleviated much of the boredom. Commenting on the run she would only say, “I wouldn’t recommend it. Maybe ten miles, but beyond that distance, well I just wouldn’t recommend it.” This event that Karen calls bizarre speaks volumes about her commitment. Managing the constant struggle between family responsibilities and running has yet to defeat her and probably never will.

Her training regimen includes speed work about once or twice per week. She mixes it up with tempo runs, mile repeats, fartleks, and when the weather is nice, 400 to 800 meter repeats on the track. “I haven't been to the track since the fall. I hate track workouts but know they make me faster.”

In addition to running, Karen weaves light arm weights and a stationary bike into her routine on rest days. Karen used to ride a bike regularly with her husband and has completed a biathlon and three 150-mile Multiple Sclerosis rides, which attests to her cycling ability. Although she has enjoyed biking, Karen prefers running because it fits easier into her busy schedule.

When asked about sharing her PRs, she said, "If my schedule would allow me to train the way I wanted to, I believe some of my PR's are in front of me. Maybe when all of the children are in school, but right now my priority is my family." Her PRs are great, but Karen, like most runners would love to run faster.

1 mile	6:02
5K	20:35
5 mile	34:12
10K	43:06
½ marathon	1:36:54
Marathon	3:30:29

The 10-mile and the half marathon are Karen's favorite race distances. She feels comfortable with her pace and endurance throughout a race at these distances. "Although I will run them, I find the 5K to be a tough distance for me. I know they are great speed workouts and can make you faster, but they just hurt. I just can't find the right pace."

The Broad Street Run and the Philadelphia Distance Run are her two favorite races, which make sense since they are her favorite distances. Besides, the distances being right for her, her extended family live in Philadelphia and she enjoys being close to them while they cheer her on during the race.

Karen completed her tenth marathon on March 30, 2003 when she ran the Ocean Drive Marathon in 3:57:58. Enduring rain, 15 mile-per-hour headwinds, and 38-degree temperatures, she said it took everything

she had to finish. Her husband's encouragement combined with Lisa Stokes running the last 10K with her were a great help to her too. Among her ten marathons to date, Karen has completed New York three times and Boston twice. She feels good about completing ten marathons although years ago she never thought she would be doing them. "When we lived in Chicago, I remember looking out our high-rise apartment window one Sunday. It was 34 degrees and there were all these runners going down our street. I later learned it was the Chicago Marathon. I said to my husband, 'Who'd be crazy enough to do that!' and now here I am doing the same thing. One of these days I would love to go back to Chicago to complete the Chicago Marathon." Karen plans to run the Harrisburg Marathon in November and qualify for Boston."

Karen's ability to not only maintain her running but also improve it is remarkable. Her life is hectic despite compounding it with running five or six days per week. She easily manages her schedule always including a run but admits she could not do it without the support of her husband and their children. They know how important it is to her and Karen believes her runs benefit them as well. She heartily repays that support by coaching Andrew's junior varsity track team at the Holy Name of Jesus School. Being a coach also allows Karen the opportunity to watch her son Vincent, a varsity track team member, practice. It is apparent Karen's schedule leaves very little time to run. Yet, Karen finds the time. The debate of quality versus quantity is over at Karen's house. Without a doubt, quality conquered quantity and Karen makes every minute count.