

Member Spotlight...



David & Cynthia Barnard

Still on the run... Yarmouth grandparents continue to log miles

by Karen Beaudoin
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When you look at the big picture of their years as runners, the Beach to Beacon 10K race may seem a little insignificant. After all, Cynthia and David Barnard have run marathons in New York City, New Zealand and Burlington, VT. Cynthia has also ridden tandem bikes through England and France with blind students and started ski programs for the blind in New York and Massachusetts. David has run the NYC Marathon with a blind Thai boy, a one-legged athlete and a quadriplegic, through the Achilles Track Club.

Still, these grandparents who vacationed in Maine for years and made Yarmouth their permanent home in 2002, are proud to say they've run every Beach to Beacon and were at the start line again for this year's race in Cape Elizabeth on Aug. 5.

"There were lots of elite runners running way ahead of us but at least you're part of the event," says Cynthia, 62. "And, of course, Joan Benoit Samuelson is our star." Cynthia and David, 64, first met Samuelson at Big Sur in 1995 and were taken by the Maine role model. Having run for years, they have been more than happy to support her race, which is sponsored by TD Banknorth and annually raises money for charitable children's causes. Cynthia has a pair of Samuelson's autographed running shoes hanging in her garage and they touch her windshield to let her know she's pulled her car in far enough.

Cynthia, who works at Maine Medical Center, ran her first marathon while working at Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center in 1989. There was a one-mile loop

around a pond on the center's campus and she began her training there during her lunch hours. She eventually worked up to marathon distance and took on NYC in 1988 with David cheering her on. The following year, he decided he didn't want to be just a spectator and joined her on the course.

"We're just back of the packers," David, who works for a small real estate company in Portland and is a member of the Coast Guard Auxiliary, said. But they keep on running.

Cynthia, who is a therapeutic recreation specialist with MMC's Hospital Elder Life Program, which helps patients over 70 remain functional and avoid delirium, does some form of exercise every day. She walks, runs on her treadmill, bikes and is religious about tai chi. David runs seven or eight miles on the weekends and participates in a couple of half-marathons each year.

Staying active has helped him recover from two bouts with cancer - throat cancer in 1993 and prostate cancer last summer.

"All that does is highlight in your life that every day is a blessing," he says. To make his point, he tells a story involving the first NYC Marathon he ran with his wife where members of the media were interviewing a group of male runners who were all over the age of 90. Rheumatoid arthritis runs through Cynthia's mother's side of the family and she lost her father to cancer so she also understands the benefits of staying active.

"It helps you spiritually," David says. "I'm not as much into holistic medicine as some people, but I firmly believe in the holistic aspects (of exercise). The body knows what's going on."

To that end, the couple traveled to New Zealand in 2000 to compete in the Millennium Marathon and Cynthia ran Burlington for her 60th birthday, with family and friends joining her for different segments the entire way.

Their legs aren't what they used to be, which is one reason why Cynthia chooses the treadmill over running on pavement. As another option, David bought his wife a kayak for her birthday.

When they're not running, walking or biking, the couple stays involved as members of the Maine Track Club. They volunteer at the 4th of July race in Freeport,

and then will usually run the course following the race. They also volunteer for the Peak's to Portland swim and at Merrill Auditorium. David no longer feels he is in good enough shape to continue escorting runners with the Achilles Track Club but still supports the cause financially.

The Barnards spend some of their leisure time on their 17-foot boat and are working on completing sails from the Intercoastal Waterway in Florida to Eastport, Maine. Titled their "celebration of life trip," they completed the Moorehead City, N.C. to New Haven leg in 1998, the New Haven to Portland trip in 1999 and the Yarmouth to Southwest Harbor leg in 2000. They plan to go from Southwest Harbor to Eastport next year and will then have only the Key West to Moorehead City route to complete.

These days, Cynthia's reasons for running include fitness, weight control and a way in which to motivate not only herself but others. But even while closing in on retirement age she still shows a bit of that competitive nature.

"It's mostly for the fun of it and that adrenaline rush," she says, "but then you look at someone and you think I can beat that person."

David, who appears cancer-free but will under go blood tests for the rest of his life, says the spirit at the starting line of a race like the Beach to Beacon still draws him and "the togetherness at the end speaks to our culture." Though he's now running at a 10-minute pace and describes himself as a "plodder" he'll continue to appreciate races like this one, no matter what setbacks he faces.

"So many people have gone through interesting stuff," he says, "and I think we're kind of normal. Luck is a lot of life and when your luck runs sour you've got to suck it up and make the best you can."



Photos by Tim Geaney