



Making a Difference One Mile At a Time

Jeff Fazio is an avid runner. Sometime in the middle of this June, his friend Dee Gerber asked him if he had a race coming up that weekend. Jeff replied in the affirmative. Dee, who is living with Congenital Myasthenic Syndrome, one of the 43 neuromuscular diseases that falls under the MDA umbrella, then asked him to do her a small favor.

“She asked me to think about her and those who can’t run when I hit the 1-mile mark on that weekend’s 5k,” Jeff recalls. “My response to her was that I would make it a point to think of those who can’t run every time I hit the mile point during a race.”

Jeff continued to ponder Dee’s request throughout the remainder of that week. He thought about how fortunate he was to be able to run, how running is not an option for everyone. But Jeff didn’t stop there – he decided to make a small button that read simply “4D.”

“As in, I am running ‘For Dee,’ since she can’t,” Jeff says. “It was literally just those two characters – 4 D – printed out on my home printer and stuck on my jersey with safety pins.”

That race turned out to be Jeff’s first 5k that featured a hill – a rather imposing one.

“We had to do two laps, and by the time I reached the top on the first lap, I was thinking, ‘These people are crazy,’” Jeff recalls. “I had ignorantly assumed that 5k races were always on flat courses.”

Jeff wasn’t sure he had enough left in the tank to complete that second lap, and figured he had no reason to put himself through that much misery and pain. He could simply stop running.

“Then I remembered I had the 4D on my shirt,” Jeff says. “Who was I to question that second lap when so many people don’t even have the option of running the first one? So I pressed on. I would have quit that race if it wasn’t for Dee Gerber.”

The following weekend, Jeff ran his first out-of-state 5k in the Bronx, NY. Prior to the start of that race, he realized he had forgotten his “4D” sheets of paper, so he quickly improvised a new “4D” sign with a fast-food napkin and stuck it on his jersey. After that second race wearing the 4D, Jeff started thinking more about its meaning, and decided it could also stand for running “For Dystrophy.” Although Dee was its original inspiration, the inspiration that got him up that rather large hill, he realized that 4D could be worn by any runner to signify their support of those who can’t run.

So Jeff took the next logical step. He went beyond printer paper and fast-food napkins and opened a CafePress store for 4D merchandise, www.cafepress.com/4d4d. He created an official logo incorporating his 4D idea with “Dystrophy” added inside the curve of the letter “D.”

“I opened the store so I could purchase a real pin to wear,” Jeff says. The CafePress site then automatically created a store featuring all sorts of 4D merchandise. “Within a day of sharing the link to the store online, I got questions from bikers, hikers, and swimmers about their desire to support my efforts,” he says. So the next day, Jeff opened www.cafepress.com/4d4dswin, www.cafepress.com/4d4dhike, and www.cafepress.com/4d4dbike. More recently, he added

<http://www.cafepress.com/4d4dswimrumbike>. Proceeds from sales of 4D merchandise on CafePress will go to MDA.

Based on this growing interest, Jeff made a big decision. He decided to run a 5k in all 50 states to share the message and keep the momentum going.

“Knowing this was an awesome task, I originally set realistic goals of being a weekend warrior and hitting states as the race schedules made it convenient,” Jeff explains. With 5k races gaining in popularity, he realized it was relatively easy to string together an itinerary that included races in several states in the same weekend. “This really inspired me and gave me a new challenge of running multiple races in a short time span,” he says. “As I built a race schedule to finish out 2013, I began to realize that I might actually have completed races in 27 states, plus D.C. and Jamaica, by January 1, 2014. That is over half of the country in the first six months.”

Jeff is hoping to complete his goal of taking the 4D message to all 50 states in a single calendar year. Unrealistic? Maybe. But betting against Jeff might be a mistake, given how far he’s come since June in his personal fight against Muscular Dystrophy. Just ask his friend and inspiration Dee Gerber.

