

# THE CINCINNATI ENQUIRER

## Running a part of recovery

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Before she started training for this weekend's Flying Pig races, Bethany Keifer had some unofficial exercise experience.

"I'll bet I walked six miles all the time when I was strung out on the streets," Keifer said. "I walked all over Mansfield looking for drugs, mostly cocaine, crack. I tell you what, I never thought I'd do a marathon relay. But I am. I'm doing really good."

Kiefer, 35, is among the couple dozen men and women associated with Cincinnati's City Gospel Mission who are running in either the Flying Pig 5K, four-person marathon relay or half-marathon this weekend. A transitional living and rehabilitation program for recovering addicts and homeless people, the City Gospel Mission is tapping the restorative health and life benefits of road running with the Flying Pig training program that culminates this weekend after 11 weeks of getting in shape.

"I was never good at anything before this," said Zollie Long, a former convict and drug addict, who at 38 will run the 5K on Saturday and the four-person relay on Sunday. "I mean, I was good at being a junkie and stealing money to get drugs. I used to have a vow that I would never run – not even for the ice cream man. But now, I'm running eight miles and learning about running techniques."

Another runner, Marvin Hall, who like Long arrived at the Mission in August as a drug addict, wrote a piece for the group's Run for the One newsletter, saying, "In 1994 I had gunshot wounds in my neck, back and left leg. The doctor said I would never walk again....This is a testimony to God for healing me and releasing me from my addictions."

Chris Heiert hoped that was the type of development that would occur when he approached the City Gospel Mission officials with his plan last fall. Heiert, a Procter & Gamble marketing director and enthusiastic marathon runner, read a story last May about a lone City Gospel Mission runner competing in the Flying Pig Marathon and figured a training program could be implemented to enable large scale participation, even though most of the program's men and women had no prior running history.

The City Gospel Mission loved Heiert's idea. The only problem was a big one: they had neither the staff to coach nor the athletic gear needed to outfit 30-some runners. Officials told Heiert if he could be in charge of a training program, then they would make it an optional part of the Mission's curriculum.

Heiert quickly drew up a training program, and then he e-mailed a group of about 10 running friends, asking them to save any extra cold-weather running clothes and shoes. He collected all the gear in his Fort Thomas basement in December and January, and when he showed up in Over-the-Rhine at City Gospel Mission in early February, he had a full complement of shoes, pants, shirts, hats and gloves for everyone who wanted to take part.

They started with a three-mile run/walk that day and eventually advanced to seven-mile training sessions. The plan was modeled after similar programs, such as Back on My Feet, a non-profit organization that engages Philadelphia's homeless population in running. City Gospel Mission's program included four running sessions per week, two of which Heiert led.

"It's been a lot of hard work," Heiert said, "but where it's been great is seeing the joy in some of the people who never thought they'd be able to do this."

In order to boost morale during the seventh week of the program, Heiert recruited about 50 friends to make signs and cheer for the group as it made a training run through Eden Park. At a luncheon last Saturday, the runners each received a team T-shirt to wear on race day.

“When they were cheering us on in Eden Park, that was so awesome,” Keifer said. “I spent 20 years on the streets. I had no identity, no hope. I was worthless and hated myself. Life is so much brighter now. Training for this has helped me feel like I’m living life, not just existing.”

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