



Cover Story

Local Cardiologist Runs NYC Marathon on American Heart Association Team

By Deb R. Brimer

Mesquite cardiologist Kevin Graves MD doesn't just talk the talk about the importance of heart health and exercise; he walks the walk. Or more specifically, he runs the run. And in November, he ran the kahuna of all runs, the New York City Marathon, on the American Heart Association (AHA) team.

"I ran twice in the White Rock Marathon and three times in the Chicago Marathon," Dr. Graves said. "I've always wanted to run the New York City Marathon and this was a great opportunity to run for charity, which I've never been able to do. So I applied to the American Heart Association. And based on my previous experience in marathons and triathlons, they chose me as one of 26 runners from across the United States."

For most runners, competing for a slot in the NYC Marathon is more challenging than training for the 26.2-mile trek.

The NYC Marathon is the world's largest marathon and part of the World Marathon Majors, which includes the Boston, Chicago, London and Berlin marathons. Although elite runners compete in New York for global standings, most runners compete for the opportunity to enter the prestigious event. While 90,000 runners apply for the marathon, the event is limited to 38,000 runners.

"Most runners are selected from a random lottery," Dr. Graves said. "Others are qualifying members of the New York Road Runners Association or represent a charity."

The American Heart Association's NYC Marathon Team raised a whopping \$66,382.80. Dr. Graves exceeded his personal goal by raising \$2,850.00 of the team total.

Part of the distinction of the NYC Marathon centers on the event's drawing power for attracting a die-hard fan base that outnumbers runners more than 50-to-1. From the race start on Staten Island to the finish line outside Tavern on the Green in Central Park, the race course winds through Brooklyn, Queens, Manhattan and the Bronx and crosses most major bridges in the city. About two million spectators line the marathon route to cheer runners as they pass by.

Touted as Marathon Sunday, the event is a festive celebration

of New York for runners and spectators alike. As runners approach the Verazano-Narrows Bridge, Frank Sinatra's New York, New York – blaring through theater speakers – sets the stage for a runner's high. And more than 100 live bands throughout the course keeps the endorphins pumping and spectators instilled with the spirit of New York.

"My usual time for a marathon is about five hours," Dr. Graves said. "But I ran this one much slower. Having never run the New York before, I didn't want to rush through it.

My wife, Kelly [who was selected to run in the random lottery], and I ran side-by-side the whole way. We took our time. And I called it a jogging tour of the five boroughs. It was the slowest marathon I've ever run and the most fun I've ever had."

The intensity level of each runner varies. While some race for a win at the finish line, others savor core sights in the Big Apple and consider the experience a victory. But most runners have at least one thing in common: a training program that conditioned them – mentally and physically – to reach the finish line.

According to Dr. Graves, the average runner who completes the marathon in five hours will burn about 750 calories or 150 calories an hour. So proper nutrition and hydration are critical.

"I trim down my training level the week or week-and-a-half before the marathon so I'm not injured," Dr. Graves said. "Then the day before the marathon, I tend to carbo load a lot with a nice carbohydrate breakfast, like pancakes. The evening before the marathon, I venture away from the traditional spaghetti dinner and go for a big baked potato. The morning of the marathon, most runners eat a bagel. It's a good wholesome carbohydrate. But it's all about calories – calories in and calories expended. Runners need to make sure their nutrition is balanced and that all the fats they're getting are good fats."

For runners who travel to a different climate for a marathon, proper hydration can be tricky.

"It's so hot here in Dallas. And a lot of our training is done in 90 degree weather," Dr. Graves said. "So we have to drink a lot more fluids. And I tend to need more sodium than most people.



But when I run a cold weather marathon where the temp is in the 40s, it's a whole different feel and a little difficult at times to know whether I'm taking in enough fluids or not."

Although Dr. Graves is an avid runner, he steps up his physical

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training significantly before a marathon.

"My training is centered around running two to three times during the week and following up with a long run on the weekend," Dr. Graves said. "I start training about three months before a marathon. During the week, I'll run five to six miles. Then on the weekend, I'll do progressively longer runs like seven, 10, 12, 14 miles. Then I'll do an 18 mile run several weeks before the marathon."

While some runners top out their training at 22 to 25 miles, longer distances increase the chance of injury. So Dr. Graves minimizes the stress he puts on his body, which in turn lowers his potential for injury.

"The day of the marathon, there's something about the herd mentality," Dr. Graves said. "When the whole herd is running, there's a lot of energy you can get from that. So you can usually run longer distances in a marathon than you run in training."

When Dr. Graves was in med school in his 20s, he started run-

ning 10K (6.2 mile) races. He ran his first marathon in 2001 at the age of 38.

Although each run introduced Dr. Graves to new people and places, the American Heart Association Team introduced him to a new world of combining his passion for running with the spirit of giving.

"Running for charity in New York was an extra boost and a lot more fun," Dr. Graves concluded. "I can say, 'yeah I ran the New York City Marathon and I helped the American Heart Association.'"

Perhaps that's the ultimate runner's high.



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