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Local man is running for those who can't

The end of the road will be in Lebanon on June 29

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For The Lebanon Daily News

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Dee Gerber of Fredericksburg is pictured with her friend, Jeff Fazio of Harrisburg. Fazio is on a year-long mission of running 5K races in all 50 states in honor of Gerber, who has Muscular Dystrophy. The last race will June 29 in Lebanon. Submitted

What began as a little favor, not much more than a "think of me," has turned into a year-long mission for one area man.

Jeff Fazio, director of student life at HACC, is spending this year running 5K races in all 50 states. By the end of March, he had logged more than 60,000 miles (including flights and rental cars) and had completed races in 43 states.

A May 13 entry on his Facebook page said, "When I land in Boise, Idaho this weekend I will be running my 46th state in the last 11 months. The following weekend will be Utah and California. Alaska and Hawaii will follow 3 weeks later."

The 5K race that will mark the end of what he calls "an insane year," will be held in Lebanon on June 29.

Originally from Reading, Fazio now lives in Harrisburg and does leadership training for HACC students.

The impetus, and the inspiration, for his year-long quest is Fazio's friend, Dee Gerber of Fredericksburg. Gerber is in accounts payable at HACC, and last year the two knew each other only through inter-campus phone calls.

"She was a voice at the other end of the phone," Fazio said recently. "I was aware she had a disability, but I didn't really know her."

Gerber was born with congenital myasthenic syndrome, a form of muscular dystrophy. She uses a scooter most of the time and is able to walk short distances with braces. But, as Gerber said of the condition, she has never been able to know the joy of running.

Fazio, who turned 40 this past year, decided it was time to become a runner. Gerber noticed his posts about running on Facebook and cheered him on through that medium.

And that would have been that, if not for a request from Gerber to Fazio that he took to heart. About a year ago, she sent him an email that would have a huge effect on both their lives.

"I asked him, just a silly little favor — if you run this weekend, when you get to one mile, think of me and all the other people who can't run," Gerber asked.



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Runner Jeff Fazio had made a tag for his jersey that said "4D," meaning, "for Dee." In June, while running a race in the Bronx, Fazio realized he had forgotten the tag, so he wrote "4D" on a napkin and pinned it to his jersey. (Submitted)

For his next race, Fazio made a tag for his jersey [Leiby, Byers Married \(http://www.idnews.com/local/ci_25789600?source=jBarTicker\)](#)

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that said "4D," meaning, "for Dee."

Then, the last weekend in June, while running a race in the Bronx, Fazio realized he had forgotten the tag, so he wrote "4D" on a napkin and pinned it to his jersey. People asked him what it meant and he explained he was running for an acquaintance who wasn't able to run herself.

It was about that time that Fazio decided to take it one step further, and he set a goal: Run 5K races in all 50 states to challenge himself and to support MDA.

Fazio felt the best slogan was simply, "I run for those who can't," and he also created a design for merchandise — proceeds from the sales are donated to MDA.

Initially, Fazio said, when he told friends and family he was going to run in all 50 states, he was met with disbelief.

"They were duly unimpressed, 'like, good luck with that,'" Fazio said. "But by September, I had done a bunch of states, and I thought 'I can do this.'"

Winning isn't the main thing, here; dedication is.

When Fazio started running, he did about a 10-minute mile, he said.

"I was hoping to get under that; getting under eight minutes is tough," Fazio said.

He since has completed one mile under seven minutes, and has done three eight-minute miles in a row, a grueling accomplishment.

"I'm usually not that fast, but I do OK," Fazio said.

Meeting some "fascinating people" has been part of the experience, Fazio said, explaining that often he's invited to "crash" overnight on the sofas of people who have never met him.

He's used a traveler's website, "couchsurfing.org (<http://couchsurfing.org>)," to find folks who welcome a fellow from another state who needs shelter while he's in the neighborhood running a race. But, largely, Fazio has funded this mission himself.

"It's been an absolutely insane year," Fazio said. "It's been awesome, though; I wouldn't trade it for anything."

It's been so interesting, in fact, that Fazio is writing a book about the experience.

For Gerber, the experience has been both uplifting and the word they both use: "insane."

"I'm still in awe of this whole experience; it's hard to wrap your head around this," Gerber said. "It's given me a whole new trust in mankind. When you're doing something like this for someone else, there's such a good feeling inside."

People take so much for granted, she said, and the racing "4D" might help folks to appreciate what they have, she said.

"It should make them aware that you have a gift, an ability, for those of us who don't have that option," Gerber said.

And that "silly little question" is responsible for initiating what has become a good friendship, Gerber added.

"It's amazing how things work," Gerber said. "I always think God puts people in your path for a reason."

The two are making the media rounds to get support for both the MDA and Fazio's 50-state mission.

"This is stretching my comfort zone, talking to so many people, trying to get sponsors," Gerber said. "But it's OK to leave your comfort zone; even asking Jeff that question (run for me), that was (uncomfortable)."

A number of runners that Fazio has met across the country are going to compete in the Lebanon 5K, Gerber said.

"The whole couch-surfing thing — it's awesome that people will open up their home to a complete stranger," Gerber said. "That takes a lot of trust on both sides."

For more information on Lebanon's first "4D 5K" race on June 29, go to www.4d5.org (<http://www.4d5.org>). For the "I Run for Those Who Can't" merchandise, go to <http://www.cafepress.com/4d4d> (<http://www.cafepress.com/4d4d>). Proceeds from the sales will be donated to MDA.



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Runner Jeff Fazio holds up his badge while in Kansas, Mo., for a run. Submitted

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