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50 states, 51 5Ks, 1 year: Harrisburg's Jeff Fazio raises Muscular Dystrophy awareness



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Have you ever had the experience of your mouth saying something before your brain considered it?

That's what happened to Jeff Fazio.

Harrisburg's Fazio recently finished running 51 5Ks in a year, which is an accomplishment in itself. However, Fazio took it a step further and ran one in every state in the country, including Washington, D.C., to raise awareness for Muscular Dystrophy. Fazio was running for his friend, Dee Gerber, who suffers from the disease.

Gerber asked Fazio to run for hers and others who couldn't. So, he began running 5Ks with a pin on it that read "4D," to stand for "For Dee."

On June 30, 2013, Fazio was signed up for a 5K in the Bronx. He wrote 4D on a fast food napkin for the race. "They asked me at registration why a guy from Harrisburg, PA, was running in the Bronx and I simply heard my mouth saying, 'I am running a 5K in all 50 states.' It just sort of came out and the lady at registration called over the race director and some other folks. They were excited that I was running all 50 until they asked me how many I had done," he said. "When I told this was the first [official] one they did not seem impressed."

After he completed his 11th race, Fazio was all in. He was ready to finish what he had haphazardly declared in the Bronx.

"The best part was seeing the affect it had on Dee and others within the Muscular Dystrophy community. It was awesome to watch the conversation spread and to see other runners sporting a 4D pin. Watching Kristy Higham, from Providence, RI, run her first marathon in Philadelphia while being the first 4D runner to finish a marathon was a beautiful moment. She was a complete stranger to both Dee and I before I met her in Rhode Island and she has been running with 4D ever since," said Fazio.

While inspiring, his trek wasn't exactly a walk in the park. Fazio works full-time at HACC, and had to balance his work life, social life and traveling around the country. "The balance was the biggest challenge, but it was so worth it. This was all really tested with the two events that were canceled, and I had to make new arrangements to replace those states," he said.

Early on, Dee and I talked about this and we agreed that if all that came of this was that I traveled the country and she went long virtually, it would be worthwhile. We share an interest in photography, so she felt like she was on the trips by viewing all of the photographs," he said. "In the end, we accomplished so much more. 4D Mission is now an actual non-profit and we raised nearly \$4,000 for our first year fundraising, have dozens of runners across the country sporting the 4D pin and many, many people talking about the experience," said Fazio.

After completing 51 5KS across the USA, Fazio said the hardest 5K was the Blizzard Blast 5K in Wyoming. "It was over 7,200 feet of elevation, 34 degrees and sideways snow. It was a flat course, but felt like you were running uphill from the lack of oxygen and the weather just made it brutal," he said.

However, a "nightmare" 5K in Kentucky led Fazio to an overall victory in the Lationia 5K. "It was organized in a small town and featured 20 different turns that were poorly marked. Runners were missing turns all over the place. This all worked out in my favor, as I actually won the entire event, not something I am typically fast enough to even

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PENN STATE FOOTBALL

 **David Jones**
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dreaming of doing," he recalled.

Fazio spoke highly of a beautiful run in Portland, Maine, and a 5K in Seattle, in which the race started at midnight during Daylight Savings, and runners technically ran negative times.

As for scheduling so many races in just 12 months, Fazio admitted it was an "interesting challenge."

"In order to get the most out of my money, I tried to do two or three events each weekend, especially if I was flying somewhere. I tried to make runs happen over long weekends and holidays. When I had to, I used vacation days," he said.

He was able to complete all 51 races with 27 trips. "If there were multiple races in the same weekend, I gave preference to either the cause I could support at the event and/or if they were offering finisher's medals," he explained.

The experience cost Fazio roughly \$19,000 or around \$370 per race. He originally was self-funded, but later opened a funding page which raised about \$2,500. Fazio paid for the rest himself.

Fazio used couchsurfing.org (<http://couchsurfing.org>) to find places to stay, to offset the cost of hotels. "It was a beautiful experience and redeemed my faith in humanity," he said.

Fazio said this experience affected many things in his life. He said he learned what 48 hours means. "I was forced to stuff so much into my weekends."


It was both life-changing and amazing to see the country this way, Fazio said. "I never considered myself to be a traveler. Now I can't imagine living without a commitment to travel."

The idea of running a 5K in all 50 states in one year was "ridiculous," said Fazio. But it got people talking.

"Sharing the experience through social media really spread the conversation and with each state the followers of the story grew and shared. This experience was even gotten Dee out and talking more and more about MD," he said.

He finished his adventure in June 2014. He also hosted a 4D 5K on June 29, and has opened a [Cafe Press shop](http://www.cafepress.com/4d4d) (<http://www.cafepress.com/4d4d>) to sell merchandise. He is also writing a book about the experience, [Running Across America: 50 States of Leadership](https://www.facebook.com/pages/Running-Across-America-50-States-of-Leadership) ([https://www.facebook.com/pages/Running-Across-America-50-States-of-Leadership/623319931070729](https://www.facebook.com/pages/Running-Across-America-50-States-of-Leadership)).

Getting to know Dee has allowed me to stop taking for granted that I can walk and run," he said.

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