

No plans to trade running shoes for slippers

85-year-old to run 5K to benefit Capuchin meal program

By Karen Mahoney

Special to your Catholic Herald

MILWAUKEE — No one can say Gene Le Boeuf is lazy.

By 3:30 every morning, he is on Milwaukee streets training for his next competitive run/walk.

He completed the Bellin 10K run/walk in Green Bay last month with a time of 2:02:49; it was one of several run/walk events in which he has competed. He's also jumped out of an airplane, gone power parachuting, hang gliding, taken a balloon ride, and has completed training to do a static jump out of an airplane.

Currently training for the GermanFest 5K run/walk to raise money for St. Ben's Community Meal Program, a Capuchin ministry that feeds Milwaukee's homeless, Le Boeuf juggles his workout schedule with a job that keeps him on his feet all day.

He's also been fast walking for 29 years.

Still not impressed with Le Boeuf?

He is 85 years old.

"I just don't want to become a couch potato," admitted Le Boeuf. "There are times I wake up in the morning and say, 'I sure would like to go back to sleep.' I am not aggressive, but after my first heart surgery I became a believer in exercise."

You read correctly. In 1980 and 1989, Le Boeuf had heart bypass surgery after suffering angina pain. Never one to watch his diet or exercise, he started listening to his doctor and was determined to get in better shape to beat the odds of recurring heart disorders.

"I retired in 1983 as vice president of sales and marketing from Feeco International in Green Bay," he said. "I set up a consulting company and worked for my previous employer and got busy doing work for others. Along the way, I ran out of time to do what my previous employer wanted done. So, in 1995, I went to Jordan, stayed on six months and supervised a seven-story, steel building over there."

The sun has not even risen when Gene Le Boeuf begins his daily 3:30 a.m. training on Milwaukee streets for his next competitive run/walk. The 85-year-old who lives in community with the Capuchins, has been fast walking for 29 years and will participate in the July 23 GermanFest 5K run/walk to raise money for St. Ben's Community Meal Program. (Catholic Herald photo by Allen Fredrickson)



After Le Boeuf's wife died from complications of a stroke, he was uncomfortable with the emptiness of the house and looked for a community in which to live.

He investigated opportunities such as the Peace Corps, but instead entered the Capuchin Community at St. Benedict where he has lived and worked the past six years.

Serving as St. Benedict plant manager, Le Boeuf oversees the maintenance of four buildings on the campus. Much of the repair work he does himself; for larger projects he procures contractor bids and presents them to the board for approval.

"We recently replaced 78 windows here and a steam line between the church and the center's house," he said, adding, "But as usual with most projects, some unforeseen problems seem to crop up."

When he isn't training, participating in events, working or involved in the ministries of St. Benedict, Le Boeuf spends time working on his memoirs.

"I wanted to put it all down in writing for my five children, 11 grandchildren and seven great grandchildren," he said. "I work on it whenever I can find the time."

While he doesn't often see many 80-plus participants in the run/walk events, Le Boeuf has come

across a few and is challenged by the fact that some are in better shape than he is.

"I couldn't believe this one guy," he said. "I was doing a 10K and falling behind this lean guy who was quite a bit older than me. He passed me up with ease but I was surprised, and by the end of the 10K, I passed him. He ran out of gas."

His numbers are impressive. For the 10K Bellin event, his mile pace was around 19:46. Although he has taken first place in some races, only one thing really matters.

"I don't care about winning, I just care about not coming in last," he said, laughing. "I try to pace myself and keep my stride even."

The July 23 run/walk for St. Ben's is important for Le Boeuf, who just might be the oldest participant in the annual event.

"They do so much good for so many people, over 2,000 hungry people are served each week," he said.

Le Boeuf is not planning to trade his running shoes for slippers anytime soon.

"I plan to continue as long as my knees hold out," he said, "I wear two knee braces because one knee is bad and doesn't line up and the other one is just a little worn out. I am thankful I have the braces because I wouldn't be able to do what I do without them."

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