

## Want to run the Freihofer's 5K? Start here

By Bill Cain

There's an old proverb that says, "A journey of a thousand miles must begin with a single step."

Likewise, the ability to run a far shorter distance, such as the 5k Freihofer's Run for Women, can begin with the first minute.

Run one minute. Walk 90 seconds. Repeat for 20 minutes. That's the first-week's workout (performed three times during the week) for the 10-week Freihofer's Training Challenge, meant as a "couch-to-5k" program, but also offering a training regimen for intermediate and advanced runners.

"The concept is, you're coming from doing nothing," program coach Kristen Hislop said. "Sometimes, people might do other activities, but they've never run. When you start to do a different activity, it's different, so it really is a matter of taking them from wherever they are to that start line. Once they get to the start line, they'll get across the finish line."

The cost is \$40, and in addition to the workouts – option of either Mondays or Wednesdays, then one on the runner's own time during the week, followed by one each Saturday – participants get a women's micromesh V-neck T-shirt, coaching, nutrition talks, access to athletic trainers and injury-prevention information, yoga after the Saturday sessions and good-form run clinics from Fleet Feet. There also is an app for runners' phones to help them in their training. It begins March 16, and there will be a presentation Thursday about the program at 6 p.m. at Troy's Italian Community Center at 1450 5th Ave.

The program is in its fifth year, and already has many success stories. One is the revitalization of Conan Helein's running habit.

Helein had been a runner, but ulcerative colitis and the resulting surgeries sidelined her for more than a year.

"All I wanted to do was to be normal, and running, to me, was normal," Helein said. "You kind of reach a point when you feel like the physical discomfort of running actually proves you're alive. You can't be alive if there isn't any kind of discomfort or pain, if that makes any sense. It's a little twisted, but . . . It's kind of like proving you're alive. You can still do things. You're not going to be competitive, but you can still push yourself. With my limitations, I feel great whenever I can push myself farther than people who don't have any limitations."

It took her about two years to get back to form, then just before the 2013 Freihofer's, her father died suddenly. She and one of her daughters, Vera, ran the race, though not mentally fit enough to do as well as Conan would have liked. Afterward, depression set in, and she approached the 2014 Freihofer's having lost one year's worth of fitness.

She signed up for the Freihofer's Training Challenge, although it ran contrary to her usual form of training.

"I'm a little bit of a loner, and in years past had always used their virtual training challenge to get ready," Helein said. "I just kind of felt like I needed to shake things up a little bit and be forced to see other human beings, feel some kind of accountability."

It was what she needed, it turns out, and she continued on to run several other races last year, including the Stockade-a-thon. This year, she said, a half-marathon is in her plans.

"It was a good jumpstart, and making contact with Kristen was a good thing," Helein said. "She is a great athlete and has a great way of motivating people. For those of us who have challenges and aren't ever going to compete at her level, it was great to be around here and feel her enthusiasm."

Helein and her daughter Vera, now an eighth-grader, opted for the intermediate workouts last year.

Marlene McTigue started four years ago as a non-runner, though she kept fit with her mountain bike. Still, taking the small steps through the beginners' program built her confidence and the coaches knew when and how to push her to do more.

"There are so many women who come into it not believing, or with a certain amount of skepticism," McTigue said. "They're not sure whether they're going to be able to do it, but there was something that got them there and made them think, 'Maybe I can do this.' To watch them go from 'Maybe I can do this' to finishing their first 5k is fantastic. It's the best thing ever. I love encouraging these women."

McTigue now serves as a mentor during the Training Challenge, running along and, as she said, more or less being a cheerleader.

"It is [empowering], and the fact that it's all women is also an amazing thing. Women encouraging women," McTigue said. "You do start to see progress very early on, and you think, 'Wow!' I remember calling my brother on the day I ran eight minutes in a row for the first time. He said, 'Eight? Did you say eight minutes in a row?' And I said, 'Yeah!' And he said, 'Well, you know, when I was in the Army, I used to run marathons.' He was totally laughing at me, but I thought it was such a great accomplishment."

"The program was such a success for me because I finished my first Freihofer's – my goal was to finish it in 30 minutes, and I finished in 30 minutes and 21 seconds. So I didn't make it quite under the 30-minute mark, but all the time we were training, I was saying, 'Oh, if I could finish around that time, I'd be really happy,' and Kristen would say, 'Of course, you're going to do it in that time.' "

"Running is so mental," Hislop said. "There's a physical piece to it, yeah, you're using different muscles and they ache, but it's more mental. It's, 'OK, I can get through this, I can do it.' And that's one thing we really try to get the women to realize is they can. They can do it. I've trained triathletes and runners, and my motto is 'Do, believe, achieve.' Get out there and do it first. Then you start to believe in yourself, and once you believe in yourself, you can make anything happen."