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Dad runs to save other families' kids

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September 18, 2010

BY SUE ONTIVEROS Sun-Times Columnist

It wasn't enough that Mike Stanton decided five weeks out that he'd be participating in the Chicago Marathon.

Really, you'd think that would be an ample challenge. A marathon is no walk in the park. It's 26.2 hard miles, a daunting endeavor even for the most seasoned runner. And Stanton is aware of what he's in for; he ran the marathon in 1999 and remembers how grueling it was.

For months now, runners have been building up their endurance for the Oct. 10 race. Go online and you'll see 18-week and 20-week training guidelines. There are no five-week training plans, which is why Stanton had to devise his own. (He said he received online comments such as, "Don't even try to do it.")

He ran 16 miles last weekend; 18 is the goal for this weekend. Still, he realizes race day is oh-so-soon.

"I'm counting on a lot of support and adrenaline to get me through," he told me last week.

Just running the marathon could have been sufficient. Instead, the Edgebrook man has attached an incredible fund-raising goal. Stanton has started a campaign to raise \$1 million for each mile of the marathon by race day. Yep, that's right, his goal is \$26 million, money that will go toward the nonprofit his family and some friends created last winter, the Danny Did Foundation.

The foundation is named for Stanton's sweet-faced 4-year-old boy who died in his sleep of a seizure disorder, Sudden Unexplained Death in Epilepsy, on Dec. 12, 2009. Last spring, I wrote about the foundation, which wants to educate others about the disorder -- which many are unaware of -- and the Emfit Movement Monitor, which warns of a seizure.

Stanton and his wife, Mariann, and family and friends have done an incredible amount of groundwork already.

They're making sure doctors and parents realize the dangers. A brochure on the disorder co-created by the Danny Did Foundation and the Epilepsy Foundation of Greater Chicago has been placed in hospitals here and across the country.

They've subsidized monitors that have been placed with families in 12 states. If you check out the foundation's website, www.dannydid.org, you'll be amazed at how far-reaching their efforts have been.

Or, check out the foundation's page on Facebook and you can read how Danny and the foundation's work have touched so many.

People profusely thank Mike and Mariann for spreading the word, and the Stantons know that Danny and their efforts have touched so many.

Yet, in quiet, reflective times, Danny's dad and mom say to one another: If only someone had done this before us.

"We would have proceeded differently," Stanton said with a wistful sigh.

Now, Stanton's got his sights set on the marathon and this fund-raising effort to put the foundation and its mission in the spotlight.

A heartfelt letter he wrote about his effort has been making the rounds on the Internet.

Stanton knows that raising \$26 million in four weeks sounds difficult to others. But here's what's really hard: Getting up every day knowing you're

not going to see your little boy again in this lifetime.

A 26.2-mile run?

Trying to raise millions of dollars?

That's a piece of cake in comparison.

In the midst of this incredible family tragedy, they have been lifted and so grateful for the efforts of others in the name of the Danny Did Foundation. So while right now they may have raised just \$3,200, stay tuned.

"You never know," Stanton said. "Mariann and I don't rule anything out."

To make a donation, go to [www .dannydid.org](http://www.dannydid.org).

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