

Kelly rolls in Marine Corps Marathon

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WASHINGTON, D.C. — Two years ago, Paul Kelly sat on the corner of Lynn Street and Wilson Boulevard in Roslyn, Va., watching his niece run in the annual Marine Corps Marathon.

Kelly, who hails from Beaufort, made a bet with his niece that he too would complete the race some day, and sure enough last Sunday, Kelly crossed the finish line in Arlington by the Marine Corps Memorial in 6 hours, 30 seconds.

While running a 26.2 mile race complete with 14 percent grade hills would be a daunting challenge for most, Kelly is a paraplegic and had to race using a hand bike, making his two-year journey that much more difficult and that much more rewarding.

"The only moment of quiet I experienced," said Kelly, "was about a mile into the race when most of the wheelchair racers had passed me but the field had not yet caught up. It was an opportunity to savor the moment. I thought, 'Here I am, and this is something I had worked for two years.'

"Then I came across a turn in the race and could see the intersection of Lynn and Wilson Boulevard and remembered when I was sitting at that corner as a spectator and I saw the hand cyclists go by. I thought, 'I could do that'.

"Sunday as I came around that corner and saw that intersection, those words just came back to me. That was my motivation for the whole race. Remembering where I was and the two years worth of training and hard work."

But Kelly was not alone in his quest. Outside of support from his wife, Sally, extended family, friends and neighbors, Kelly was part of team Hope For the Warriors.

Hope for the Warriors is a nonprofit group that raises money for wounded warriors in the Armed Services.

The entirety of the funds raised by Hope for the Warriors goes towards the organization's multiple useful charities. Hope for Warriors offers scholarships to the families of wounded service members, grants wishes to wounded service members as part of "A Warrior's Wish" program, supplies the use of Warrior House, which provides living quarters to injured service members and their families, and offers immediate needs such as travel money for families or money to pay for long stays away from home.

And Kelly was just one man in a 52-person team, which made his journey so much more fulfilling to be able to support those who have given so much in honor of the United States.

"I was part of the Hope for the Warriors charity team," said Kelly. "We are called Team Hope for the Warriors. I was one of 52 runners who raised over \$60,000 dollars for the charity. One of my teammates was Corry Dunlap. When I got to the steepest hill on the final two-tenths of a mile, he came out to meet me. I think he probably thought he was going to have to push me up that hill. He asked what he could do, and I just asked him to stand behind me because I knew I was going to be crawling. He tried to push me, and I told him I could do it myself, so I started inching my way up the hill."



Hand cycling racer Paul Kelly from Beaufort pushes through an early leg of the Marine Corps Marathon on Sunday. Kelly was part of team Hope for the Warriors, which raises money to support wounded soldiers. The completion of the race was the culmination of two years of hard work and training for Kelly. (Sally Kelly photo)

That final leg became the most arduous part for Kelly, but he had trained for it. Kelly, who has the use of his biceps but cannot use his triceps, is only able to ratchet himself up a hill, inch by excruciating inch using a technique he perfected on the bridges of Morehead City and Atlantic Beach.

On that final leg, Kelly received his biggest boost of support — from teammates, family and the announcer, who gave the crowd updates and asked everyone to remove their caps when Kelly rode by because he carries an American Flag with him in every race.

Kelly, who had a blue tooth cell phone attached to his ear, phoned his mother so she could listen in to his push up the hill and crossing the finish line.

"It is just a great race," said Kelly. "I knew it was going to be the hardest race I have ever done because of the hills. One thing I didn't expect was how much fun this race would be. I really experienced the spirit of the race, and that made it unique.

"There was a whole lot of support out there on the course. There was a lot of motivation and a lot of inspiration. It seemed to me that the yelling and words of encouragement was louder from the runners than that of the spectators."

When Kelly started to prepare two years ago, he also came up with a three-pronged plan to raise awareness for Hope for the Warriors. The first leg of the plan, called "hope," called for him to complete the Marine Corps Marathon.

The second leg, "inspiration," called for Kelly to cover 2,008 miles of road in training and races across the nation, and he accomplished that.

The third leg, "promise," calls for Kelly to raise \$26,200 dollars for Hope for the Warriors.

As of the Marine Corps Marathon, Kelly was just over the \$11,000 mark, so there is still more to do.

And Kelly, whose rallying call is "Let's Roll," has plenty of stamina to keep on going.

He is currently signed up for the City of Oaks Half Marathon on Sunday, the OBX Half Marathon the following Sunday and the Jacksonville, Fla., Bank Marathon in late December.

When asked whether he would be back in Washington D.C. next October, Kelly responded with a huge smile, "Absolutely."

To make a donation to Kelly's 2008 Miles of Hope campaign, visit his Web site at www.active.com/donate/2008Miles. To find out more information about Hope for the Warriors, visit the Web at www.hopeforthewarriors.org.