

Ultra-marathon runner raises funds for SK Cares

By KENDRA GRAVELLE

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SOUTH KINGSTOWN — Steve Canter is on a mission to push himself to his limit while lending a hand in the community he calls home.

"I'm kind of a glutton for punishment, I think," Canter joked Monday.

A resident of Wakefield, Canter has signed up for the Last Man Standing Ultramarathon, and he's chosen to raise funds for South Kingstown Cares.

The ultra-marathon—which will take place over Labor Day weekend at Pineland Farms in New Gloucester, Maine—will require its participants to run a 4.2-mile loop each hour for 24 hours.

"They basically reset the race at the top of every hour," Canter explained. "If you don't make the 4.2-mile loop within 60 minutes you're eliminated."

That repeats for either an entire day or until there's one runner left. So far around 50 competitors have registered.

Last year's winner was able to complete 20 loops, running a total of 84 miles.

And this year, Canter has set out to win.

"I'm kind of a push-your-previous-limits kind of person," he added, "and I legitimately

think I can win."

Canter took up running as a hobby two-and-a-half years ago, and in the time since has already run a 50-mile race at the same course where he'll run the ultra-marathon and has completed a 100-kilometer race in Utah.

Canter also teamed up last December with U.S. Marine and Paralympic athlete Rob Jones to organize a 24-hour run right here in South Kingstown. The run involved traveling up-and-down the William C. O'Neill Bike Path. Canter made it 81 miles and was able to raise nearly \$10,000 for wounded military veterans.

"It felt good to be able to do that," he said. "I'm just trying to utilize my gift for handling a little pain here and there."

With less than three months until September's ultra-marathon, Canter has been out training during all hours of the day.

"On Friday night I was the weird guy with the headlamp and reflective vest on, running up and down Main Street in Wakefield between 11:30 and 1:30 a.m.," he laughed. "I'm certainly preparing to try to win."

He added he lifts weights and typically runs twice per week, peppering in what he called "oddball runs."

"You need to get used to running when you're the most uncomfortable and when

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- Steve Canter

you're used to not running," he said. "This 24-hour race starts at noon and goes ultimately until noon the next day, so I've got to get used to running during those hours when I normally would be sleeping."

But while he's determined to win, his main goal is to raise as much money for SK Cares as he can.

"We were looking for a local organization to help," said Canter, who has one son, David, entering first grade at Peace Dale Elementary School and another, Axel, who will enter the school district in a couple years.

Founded in 1997, SK Cares was developed as a needs-based support for the South Kingstown school district. In the last year alone, more than 350 SK Cares volunteers have worked over 6,500 hours.

"I wanted to make sure I could pay them back for what they do for our kids," said Canter, whose wife Stephanie has done some volunteer work for the non-profit organization. "The development of kids—not only mine but all the kids in the district—is important, so we certainly want to be able to give back."

Bridget Gonsalves, president of SK Cares, said Tuesday she appreciates Canter's efforts.

"This generous gesture would really enable us to do so many more activities with homework club and mentoring," Gonsalves said.

SK Cares survives mostly off money earned through fundraisers, and also receives a small stipend from the school district.

"It's definitely a struggle for us financially at different times," Gonsalves said, "so this is just so incredible."

She added Canter's efforts "speak to the philosophy of [SK Cares] to give back in any way that you can."



Photo by Kendra Gravelle

Wakefield resident Steve Canter is training for an ultra-marathon, raising funds for SK Cares.

Canter's goal is to raise \$10,000. As of Tuesday—three weeks after his fundraising began—he'd already raised nearly \$3,400.

"It's an aggressive goal," Canter said, "but I think it's doable."

Originally from Virginia, Canter moved with his wife to South Kingstown in 2012. After a brief move to Charleston, South Carolina, the couple returned with their children last year to the Ocean State.

"We moved back because we loved it," Canter said. "We loved the school system here and the people and the area—so now we're just trying to make as much of an impact here as we can."

His wife and children have been cheering him on in his training, and they'll be by his side when he laces up his running shoes on the day of the ultra-marathon.

"This [ultra-marathon] is a unique situation where you're running in a loop, and you're going to see those smiling faces every hour," Canter said. "Hopefully that'll be a pick-me-up, and I can make it to the end."