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Roseville runner's training regimen gets her life back on track

BY KRISTA JAHNKE
FREE PRESS SPORTS WRITER

Lisa Newman has a list tucked in an old journal on her bookshelf. On it are her life goals: Visit Australia. Hike the Grand Canyon. Qualify for an Ironman. Most are still far-off dreams, but Newman is on her way to making one of them come true. The 36-year-old Roseville woman weighed more than 300 pounds two years ago. Yet, save some unforeseen injury, she will run a marathon in October. Does that sound crazy? You don't know Newman. Lisa Newman has lost more than 100 pounds in just eight months. The hardest part is behind her. "If I can lose 100-plus pounds," Newman said, "then I can run a marathon."

The odds are certainly not with her. Many people begin training to run 26.2 miles but get injured, too burnt out or sore to go on.

Newman has been running only since fall. Her longest race to date is a 5K.

But she's determined. She has already signed up to run the Detroit Free Press/Flagstar Marathon, set for Oct. 18 in downtown Detroit and Windsor. And she's running for a cause. She's raising money for Marathon Mission, a Canton-based nonprofit that directs money to various local and national charities.

GETTING HERE

Growing up in Sterling Heights, Newman, now a shift supervisor at a Starbucks in Shelby Township, was athletic but still struggled with her weight.

She ran cross-country and played softball at Macomb Lutheran North High School. She attended North Central University in Minnesota, where she studied pastoral studies, youth ministry and Biblical languages, and played basketball for one season.

When she quit the team to make time to work, the weight started to pile on.

"I got into bad habits," she said. "I was not exercising. I was ordering pizza."

Her weight continued to climb after college, when she moved to south Florida to begin a career. Away from her family and friends and dealing with the stress of running a career-counseling center, she sought comfort in food. "It was stress relief, and it was a convenience thing," she said. "It was, 'Hey, I'm starving. Where can I get food now?' It was fast food."

At her heaviest, Newman was 308 pounds.

It wasn't obvious to outsiders that the weight really bothered her.

"On the outside, she always seemed jovial," said Marathon Mission founder Lisa Harper, who has known Newman since she was a teenager. "I don't know what was going on inside during that time."

Newman said her happy-go-lucky demeanor made it difficult to commit to losing weight. She never met a diet or fad she wouldn't try.

South Beach, Atkins, Weight Watchers and Jenny Craig "like five times," Newman said. At one point, she lost 42 pounds -- but gained most of it back.

"For 10 years, I started a diet every Monday," Newman said. "I was acutely aware that I needed to lose weight. But I didn't have the three elements you need: accountability, tools and support."

MOVING HOME

It took a move to find those things.

In 2007, when it became clear her grandmother, Jene Winkelman, was nearing the end of her life, Newman left her career and came back to Michigan. As she watched her grandmother grow weaker, Newman renewed her pledge to turn her own life around.

Her grandmother died the day after Easter Sunday in 2007. A grieving Newman reached a breaking point when a doctor told her she needed to take a third daily medication to control her blood pressure.

The day after Thanksgiving that year, Newman went to a presentation about the Henry Ford Weight Management System. "I sat there and saw these people," Newman said. "Some had lost 70 pounds; some lost 30. I saw pictures on the wall of people who lost 100-plus pounds. I remember thinking, 'I don't want to be diabetic or have other complications with my life.' I thought, 'Now is the time.' "

For the first eight months, Newman stuck to a diet that consisted only of shakes. She swam laps, trying to burn 2,000 calories a week. The weight peeled off.

Then in the fall, while walking at Stony Creek Metropark, she broke into a run with her dog. It felt good.

It was at a Marathon Mission event that Newman committed to running a marathon. Inspired by the Mission's movie chronicling last fall's Detroit race, Newman told Harper she was going to run the Chicago Marathon. Harper, herself an 11-time marathoner said, "Why not Detroit?"

It was a good move. Through the Marathon Mission, Newman has access to a support team and a trainer who believes in her, even though she doesn't fit the usual profile of a successful marathoner.

"We want to be wise for her," Harper said. "I know she's determined, and she's not looking to break any time records. I think, hey, she lost all that weight. If she can do that, she can do this. She has determination. She can do a marathon." Newman believes it. She's now running 20 miles a week. And she's got a number to chase -- her goal weight of 150 pounds.

"This is the time in my life to do this," she said. "It's going to be crazy journey."

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ADDITIONAL FACTS

How's Lisa doing?

Come back to The Fit to see how Lisa Newman fares as she trains for her first marathon. We'll chronicle her challenges and celebrate her triumphs once a month in the Sunday Life section.

You Can Run, Too

Registration for the Detroit Free Press/Flagstar Marathon is under way. The 26.2-mile race is Oct. 18. Cost: \$75 if you sign up before June 30.

Web: www.detroitmarathon.com, includes links to training advice and a downloadable registration form.

MARATHON MISSION

Learn more about the organization that Newman is working with to run her first marathon at www.marathonmission.net or call 734-775-3073. The movie that inspired Newman will be shown at 1:15 p.m. today at Connection Church, 3855



Lisa Newman, 36, of Roseville stretches before running recently in Grosse Pointe Shores as part of her training for the Free Press/Flagstar Marathon in October.



In this before photo, Lisa Newman poses with her grandmother, Jene Winkelman, who helped inspire her.

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