

# SON RUN

*Mechanicsburg  
dad runs 200-  
plus miles to  
increase pace of  
pediatric cancer  
research.*

BY KAREN  
HENDRICKS



**“WE NEED TO DO MORE BECAUSE KIDS ARE DYING,  
AND I KNOW THAT’S HARSH, BUT PEDIATRIC CANCER IS  
THE NUMBER-ONE KILLER OF KIDS UNDER 16.”**

**—MIKE MCCAULEY**

It's not every day that your teenager texts you uplifting messages like, "I'm extremely proud of you," and "You're a hell of a human," and "Love you, Dad."

There was also, "Thanks for letting me use the Jeep—I put \$30 [of gas] in it."

Those texts "were like fuel," said Mike McCauley, which inspired his run throughout the first weekend of November. It was the run of a lifetime by the 55-year-old Mechanicsburg dad, a run dedicated to his 17-year-old son Lachlan.

#### RETRACED THE PATH

"As I evolve in my running, I want my miles to have purpose," said McCauley, a real estate appraiser and lifelong runner who grew up in Harrisburg. "And I thought, 'Wouldn't it be cool to raise awareness, to run through my son's cancer journey, his full circle of treatment?'"

So, this past fall, McCauley plotted a 210-mile circular course—from the Penn State Health Milton S. Hershey Medical Center to Philadelphia's Wills Eye Institute, Children's Hospital of Philadelphia (CHOP) and then back to Hershey.

The plan was a carefully guarded secret until he began running on Oct. 31. Then it went viral in the Facebook group "Endure 4 a Cure," which tracked McCauley's progress and grew to nearly 2,500 members. And that's how he wanted to reach people—personally, one-on-one.

"I wanted to make a big statement, to have this grow organically on social media because raising awareness is about developing compassionate hearts and minds," he said.

The awareness is the "war" against pediatric cancer, including his family's personal battle, which started in the fall of 2006. At the dinner table, then 4-year-old Lachlan's eye looked glassy.

McCauley then recalled the ensuing "slow motion" series of events. A local eye exam led to an MRI in Hershey, appointments and surgery at world-renowned Wills Eye, then treatment at CHOP. The diagnosis? Rhabdomyosarcoma, an aggressive and rare cancer, which caused a tumor in the orbit of Lachlan's eye.

Thirteen years later, McCauley's footsteps retraced the same path on the diagnosis dates. Many of his fellow ultra-runners took turns running by his side for the four-day

weekend. One of them was Leo Lutz, 49, of Harrisburg. He left work on Friday, hopped on an Amtrak train and headed to Philadelphia to join McCauley for 40 to 50 miles.

"This idea—all of it made complete sense" Lutz said. "You have to understand something about ultra-runners—you don't say no to challenges."

#### LIKE A MANHUNT

Running into Philadelphia on Kelly Drive, Lutz recalls a "crazy, magical" moment that buoyed their spirits.

A running group passed them, going the opposite way. All of a sudden, one of the runners spotted McCauley and called out, "Hey, you're that guy from Hershey."

That's when McCauley knew that his social media was working. Pacers and crewmembers posted, monitored and read encouraging Facebook messages to McCauley along the way or in between meals and naps in the RV.

Kelly Spreha, Harrisburg Area Road Runners' vice president, was a critical crewmember—she drove the RV that was never more than 10 miles away from McCauley. It was a tall task since the running route followed busy roadways, plus off-road paths such as the Schuylkill River Trail. Oh, and it was only the second time in her life that she'd driven an RV.

Many "serendipity stars aligned" along the route, said Spreha. For example, when they needed to plug the RV in overnight, they luckily found a restaurant where the manager—also a runner—obliged.

"Trying to navigate through the narrow streets of Conshohocken was the biggest challenge," she said. "Outside of navigation, the biggest challenge was dropping pins for the pacers to find us—it was like a manhunt."

Spreha stocked the RV with nutritional supplements—meals such as quesadillas, plenty of coffee and even pickle juice, which relieves muscle cramps.

How did McCauley feel physically? "You can't print what I would tell you," McCauley said. "I'd never had pain that basically permeated through my bones."

But he knew that Lachlan was awaiting his return to Hershey.

"He hugged me tight," he said. "He was beside himself. And he said, 'I knew you were going to do it.'"

#### GO TOGETHER

Today, Lachlan is a 17-year-old senior at Cedar Cliff High School who plays rugby and has perfect vision. McCauley calls him a "gentle giant." He worries about his son's future—which might include secondary cancers—and he's frustrated by the slow pace of cancer research.

"A softer approach isn't who I am," McCauley said. "We need to do more because kids are dying, and I know that's harsh, but pediatric cancer is the number-one killer of kids under 16. The families are frustrated by the federal government giving less than 4 percent of [NIH] funding to pediatric cancer research." McCauley encouraged Endure 4 a Cure fans to support two organizations—Four Diamonds and the Emily Whitehead Foundation—and they responded with nearly \$8,000. "The five-year survival rate for children with cancer has increased to more than 80 percent, but many of those children may have long-term side effects from the toxic effects of what we call three pillars of traditional treatment—surgery, chemotherapy and radiation," said Autumn Ghigiarelli, executive director of the Emily Whitehead Foundation.

The Philipsburg foundation may hold the key to the future of pediatric cancer treatment. It's named for a Pennsylvania girl who was the first child in the world to receive innovative CAR T-cell therapy, which activated her immune system to attack and destroy cancer cells. Her leukemia has been in remission since her 2012 treatment at CHOP.

"There's a saying that, if you want to go fast, go alone, and if you want to go far, go together," Ghigiarelli said. "Not only does that directly apply to Mike, how far he went, and the people who supported him, but it's also true for pediatric cancer treatment. If we all work together, we can get there." **B**

*Please see [fourdiamonds.org](http://fourdiamonds.org) and [emilywhiteheadfoundation.org](http://emilywhiteheadfoundation.org) for more information. You can find the Endure 4 a Cure Facebook group at [facebook.com/groups/endure4acure](https://www.facebook.com/groups/endure4acure). Mike McCauley's next adventures include several upcoming ultra-marathons and the April 20 Boston Marathon.*



# RUN HEAR

*From their Carlisle home, couple hosts popular running, marathon podcast.*

*By Karen Hendricks*



*Angie Spencer*



*Trevor Spencer*

It's possibly the most-listened-to podcast produced in the Harrisburg area.

The stats are impressive: 8.4 million total downloads, including 100,000 monthly downloads to a worldwide audience, and a banner 10th anniversary this month. In podcast years, that makes Marathon Training Academy the old man on the block.

"When we first started, we didn't know how it would be received," said Angie Spencer. "We figured there would be an appetite, but we've been blown away."

Her partner, at Marathon Training Academy and in life, is her husband Trevor. From a home base of Carlisle, the couple records three monthly podcasts, offering marathon training and running advice, plus interviews with health and fitness experts, authors and runners. Guests run the gamut, from elite athletes like Shalane Flanagan, Deena Kastor and Meb Keflezighi to trailblazing novice runners like the Philadelphia area's Gene Dykes—who recently became the fastest marathoner over the age of 70.

Running advice and stories, it turns out, are perfect for podcasts.

"No matter how famous or accomplished, most runners have gone through struggles that are very relatable," Trevor said. "They've questioned why they're putting themselves through suffering, they've had breakthroughs that are amazing, and it's all inspiring."

And they tend to be great podcast guests.

"Most people in the running community are humble and caring, approachable and down to earth," Trevor said.





*Images courtesy of Marathon Training Academy*

## CHEMISTRY, COMMUNITY

Angie and Trevor, married for 16 years, are as authentic and real as their guests. In fact, tune into any one of their 300 podcasts, and you'll quickly realize that, like many couples, they are opposites.

Angie, a certified running coach, is organized and disciplined. Morning runs are her jam, and she offers much of the podcast's practical training advice. Trevor, a self-proclaimed couch potato, doesn't always stick to his training plans. He's the comedian or color commentator playing off Angie's straight man podcast role.

"A lot of people relate to my story because they aspire to run marathons but don't necessarily stay on top of their training," Trevor said. "But Angie is really faithful with her running, and some people relate to her."

One thing they have in common is that they both discovered long-distance running later in life. Angie, hoping to lose weight after having the couple's second of three sons, ran her first marathon (26.2 miles) in 2008 but was plagued by injuries.

She was determined to learn how to train properly and succeed. She earned her USA Track and Field Level 1 and Road Runners Club of America Level 2 coaching certifications. And the couple realized there weren't many resources, especially podcasts, to help the ever-increasing number of everyday runners attempting marathon runs.

So, they started one, launching Marathon Training Academy as a part-time venture.

"I started running about the same time of our early episodes, so I was sharing my evolution as a runner," said Trevor. "Angie would debrief me, and my lack of training was the topic of a lot of episodes—confessions of a lazy runner training for a marathon."

The message, and their on-air chemistry, resounded with listeners.

"The podcast is what built the MTA community," Trevor said.

## CHANGE YOUR LIFE

During the first four years, sponsors came on board then Angie began accepting coaching clients. MTA grew from the Spencers' side hustle to their primary, full-time source of income for the past six years. Today, Angie is joined by a team of 10 coaches who provide one-on-one coaching to several hundred runners of all abilities, from first-time marathoners to seasoned runners attempting PRs (personal records).

Their previous careers? Trevor was a pastor, and Angie worked as a registered nurse.

Throughout the podcast's evolution, Trevor has finished 25 half marathons and 17 marathons—"something I'd never thought I'd say," he adds. He's headed to the Jerusalem Marathon this month.

Angie recently completed a longtime bucket-list goal of running a marathon in all 50 states. And when she crossed the finish line at Hawaii's Revel Kulia Marathon in January, she also finished first in her age group and notched a PR. That brings her total number of marathons completed to 58.

Speaking of states, Trevor is from California while Angie hails from Montana. At the time of their podcast launch, they lived in Missouri.

"We were doing the business full-time and realized we could live anywhere with an internet connection," said Angie, whose sisters and mother were living in Pennsylvania.

"We did some exploratory visiting, and people kept telling us, if they could live anywhere in Pennsylvania, it would be the Harrisburg area," Trevor said.

They made the move in 2017 and chose Carlisle for its "great schools, great hills and the Appalachian Trail," Trevor said.

Since their move, Angie's mother and one sister relocated to Carlisle, too.

The Spencers record the podcast in their home studio—which can take up to 20 hours per episode—while their sons (ages 15, 13 and 9) are in school. They have also taken the show on the road, even podcasting throughout three cross-country family trips. In the summer of 2018, the family logged more than 10,000 miles from Carlisle to Alaska, and back, doing numerous marathons and races along the way.

"The 'pinch me moment' is getting to meet listeners everywhere we've gone, because you realize you're making a difference in people's lives," Angie said.

During every podcast, the Spencers remind listeners of their tagline, "Run a marathon and change your life."

Angie admits it may sound corny, but insists the process of running 26.2 miles provides valuable life lessons.

"It spills over into other areas of life," she said. "People tell us how running a marathon gave them the resilience needed to get through tough times, a job loss, relationships. The mentality of listening to your body, developing a long term love affair with running—I try to model that in my own life, how running helps me be a better person, a better wife and better mother. Running adds to your life."

Advice, for the long run. **E**

*For more information on Marathon Training Academy, visit [marathontrainingacademy.com](http://marathontrainingacademy.com). You can find the MTA podcast on their website and podcast platforms, including iTunes.*



## RUN ON

*Amid pandemic, many find therapy on the run.* | BY KAREN HENDRICKS

**A** body in motion tends to stay in motion. Sound familiar? It's part of Sir Isaac Newton's first law of motion. Physics aside, it's also a credo many runners live by.

"Running provides a sense of freedom—I find joy in it, and running has always been one of my coping mechanisms," said Joe Church, 68, a longtime Harrisburg resident who now resides in Dover, York County.

And he knows a thing or two about staying in motion. Church typically runs 50 to 60 miles per week. He's completed 103 marathons—at least one in each of the 50 states, on all seven continents and in 44 different countries. He also ran the marathon distance (26.2 miles) around a cruise ship deck. Not once—but 29 different times. And those runs were just for fun (at least that's how Church defines them), so they didn't count as actual "races."

In March, Church was in the Cook Islands, planning to run a marathon there, when the pandemic swept across the globe to the United States. The race was canceled, flights were being canceled, but he was able to catch one of the last ones home—just in time for Pennsylvania's stay-at-home orders.

But he's not exactly a homebody—running provided an "escape."

"It helped me because when you're thinking about people getting laid off from their jobs, or people not being able to pay their rent—I have friends in that situation—running allowed me to take that in my

head and deal with it," Church said. "If I feel any anxiety, running has always been a relief."

Many runners, like Church, find running therapeutic during the pandemic. According to an informal poll of more than 200 River Runners, a Harrisburg-area running group, 75 percent said they've been maintaining or increasing their typical running mileage since the pandemic.

And apparently there's a psychological reason for that. "So much control was taken away from us during the pandemic, and most everybody's coping skills were taken away too, and that's one reason we're seeing a surge in walking and running—people are going stir-crazy, cooped up," said John Dennis, a counselor and sports psychologist at Parenting & Family Solutions LLC, with offices in Harrisburg and Lancaster. "And for long-time runners, it's part of their daily routine—a spirituality, like a religion."

Running, he said, improves the mind, body and spirit. Beyond the obvious physical benefits, the release of endorphins decreases stress, anxiety and depression and regulates a healthy appetite and sleep cycle.

Those endorphins, a "runner's high," are addictive—in a good way.

"In terms of mental health... for the majority of people, running is a way to clear their head," Dennis said.

However, mentally and emotionally, COVID-19 also constructed hurdles on runners' paths. After months of training, many runners are "grieving" the loss of canceled races—the non-existent high school track season, local races and high-profile events such

as the Boston Marathon, Dennis said.

One of those runners is Scott McGeary, 32, of Harrisburg, who's been a competitive runner since his high school days at Central Dauphin East. With his 2020 race schedule canceled, he's increased his weekly run totals to about 90 miles.

"Running is my identity—more so than anything else," McGeary said. "My eating schedule, my travel schedule—everything is based around running. It's my stress relief, my exercise, my fun time, my socialization, my competitive outlet."

McGeary, clinic director and physical therapist at Mechanicsburg's Pivot Physical Therapy, has a recommendation for brand-new runners: a couch-to-5K plan that involves intervals of running and walking that gradually introduces your body to running.

Runners over-doing their mileage may become his patients this fall.

"It typically takes three to six months for overuse injuries, so the fallout from COVID-19 changes in running are a few months down the road," McGeary said.

The social aspects of run clubs, or lack thereof during the pandemic, is also affecting runners.

"Enjoying a cup of coffee with friends after a run—that will come again," said Mary Lou Harris, 73, of Camp Hill. "While I'm not always cognizant of my age, when I realized I was part of that vulnerable population, I realized I had to be smart and run strictly solo—the social things can wait."

Harris, the founding race director of Harrisburg's "Capital 10-Miler: A Run for the Arts," is concerned about the pandemic's ripple effects on races, charities that typically benefit from race proceeds, plus race-related tourism.

"As we come out of this, I think people will be looking for races closer to home—perhaps smaller races trying to help a charity," said Harris. "In terms of runners' comfort level in racing again, providing a safe, healthy race environment is really a puzzle. People are scrunched together at the start and finish lines—how do you make that safe?"

Amid the pandemic, both Harris and Church signed up for a number of "virtual race challenges," in which runners track their total monthly or summer miles. For example, the Runsylvania 283 organized by Fleet Feet Mechanicsburg challenges runners to rack up 283 miles—the approximate distance across the state—between the first and last days of summer. The sign-up fee includes a shirt and other goodies; proceeds benefit a nonprofit assisting with COVID-19 relief efforts.

At her age, Harris wonders, "Have I run my last [traditional] race? It's sobering but you come to terms with it."

Church is simultaneously participating in several virtual race challenges. In addition to the Runsylvania 283, he's running virtually across New York (a 1,000K distance) and Tennessee. He submits his running mileage to all three challenges.

"One of the benefits, if there is a bright side of pandemic running, is that in real life you can only go to one race at a time," said Church. "But with virtual races, I can be virtually in many places at once." **B**





Karen Hendricks

## INSPIRED MILES

*Reflections on running 50 races for 50 causes while I was 50.* | BY KAREN HENDRICKS

It's hard to run in a Santa suit.

Running up and over a steep bridge—if you have a fear of heights—is mentally challenging.

And if you've suddenly lost your beloved dog to canine cancer, it's an emotional experience to participate in a race designed for dogs and their owners—minus your dog—two weeks later.

Those were some initial takeaways from a yearlong running challenge I recently completed.

I set out to run 50 races for 50 causes while I was 50.

I thought 50 race experiences would be a challenging, meaningful way to give back to others, while celebrating a banner year through something I love—running. My run buds caught my enthusiasm and joined in. Non-running friends thought I was insane. My husband worried I'd end up injured. (Spoiler alert: I miraculously did not.)

I want to make it clear that I consider myself a very average runner. Throughout the year, I achieved a few things, but my personal milestones were nothing compared to the trailblazing people dedicated to lifechanging causes that I met along the way. And like everything else in 2020, my plans were shaped by a worldwide pandemic—as much as I didn't want them to be.

It all began last September with a mountainside 5K that helped at-risk youth, a beachy half marathon with a big bridge that benefitted volunteer firefighters, and York's White Rose Run—a 5-miler through city streets that fought opioid addiction.

All year, I met incredible people, heard both heartbreaking and triumphant stories, and learned head-shaking-worthy statistics. For example, about 130 people die every day in this country due to opioid addiction. I met a woman—about my age—who battled to save her son from being one of those statistics. Because she ultimately couldn't, she co-founded York County's nonprofit chapter of Not One More. Now she's working to save other families from her heartache.

More heartbreaking odds: One out of every three dogs will develop some type of canine cancer in their lifetime. My own beloved Jack suddenly became one of

those statistics last fall, just two weeks before Gulliver's Run. This 5K at Gifford Pinchot State Park has raised \$66,000 for canine cancer research since 2013 thanks to its dedicated founder, who also lost his best friend to canine cancer. Running can indeed ease heartbreak.

Running also forges friendships. My friend Ali and I drove through the pouring rain—and questioned our sanity—to run the Spring Valley 4-Miler, part of the York Road Runners' Winter Race Series, which supports the local running community. Dripping wet, we huddled under a tent by the finish line, mud swirling down the road, to enjoy the sweet victory of race donuts—and laughed.

The year took a somber turn for all of us in March. Life—and our plans—lurched. More than a dozen spring races I'd signed up for were canceled or postponed, and I wondered if I'd be able to continue—almost exactly at my halfway point. One thing I knew for sure. I needed running in my life more than ever before. Running was the best escape from the reality of this pandemic, and some days I just wanted to keep running and not return.

Slowly, races adapted and went “virtual,” meaning you could sign up, run the distance in your neighborhood or anywhere you'd like, and your race fees and donations still benefitted great causes—because let's face it, nonprofits still needed help.

Running the Paterno Family Beaver Stadium Run 5K in my neighborhood didn't provide quite the same atmosphere, but the event still supported Special Olympics of Pennsylvania during its 50th anniversary year.

As 2020 wore on, virtual races morphed into long distance challenges, like the One NY 500K (311 miles). My friend Joanne and I both ran 500K over two months to total 1,000K—the distance from Niagara Falls to the easternmost tip of Long Island. Every day, we logged our socially distanced miles, texted each other for support, and watched our little runner graphics move across a New York map.

Those miles, powered by our donations, raised money for COVID-19 relief efforts—a cause that didn't even exist six months prior, when I began my race planning. As New York City began to emerge from the pandemic, it felt like our miles made a difference. Long-term running goals aligned with the long-term endurance we'd need to survive 2020. Running was therapy.

Additional challenges included the summer-long Runnsylvania 283 (the mileage across Pennsylvania)—also benefitting COVID-19 relief, Harrisburg River Runners' June 100-mile challenge aiding the Central Pennsylvania Food Bank, 76 miles in July for Philadelphia's homeless nonprofit Back on My Feet, and I contributed 50 of the nationwide Million Miles for Justice in the wake of George Floyd's death.

I started to equate longer distances with deeper causes. If only I could run long enough to get to the roots of our society's issues.

And so, running became a way for me to process the events of the past year. Through it all, I felt grateful to be alive, grateful to have the ability to run, grateful to be outside—often with my husband nearby on his bike, grateful for friends and family who donated to many of my causes. When people care enough to say they believe in you, it's humbling. And empowering. My 50 races for 50 causes totaled 1,176 miles, raised thousands of dollars and even earned me a few race medals and PRs (personal records—at the age of 50!) along the way.

I couldn't have done it without causes that motivated me to help make the wrongs of our society a little more right.

I logged many miles in Harrisburg, along the river or around the Greenbelt, including my final, 50th race. About 25 friends joined me on City Island to run the Brave Like Gabe 5K for rare cancer research. Do you remember how absolutely perfect and beautiful Labor Day weekend was? A bald eagle flew over the island as we gathered—a magical moment that captured the spirit of the entire past year.

Because the power of running also somehow generates magic over the miles. In between those split seconds when our feet touch the ground, there's also a split second of hang time when they're not. It's the closest we'll ever get to flying. My friend Marjorie took a picture of me at August's socially distanced Harrisburg Mile—also on City Island—and magically, she captured that tiny sliver of time. Neither of my feet is touching the ground.

Running puts us in touch with hard realities that are sometimes cruel and unfair. But running also sets us in motion. It supports amazing people defying odds, overcoming challenges, researching diseases, innovating social change, striving for better.

Running puts our feet on the ground. But it also helps us fly. I have 50 memories to prove it. **B**

*Karen writes about her 50 races, and all 50 causes, at [InspiredMiles.com](https://InspiredMiles.com)—including why it's hard to run in a Santa suit. She apologizes if you read this entire article thinking you'd find out here.*