

## Running life: Berlin wants to give back to sport of running

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**Talia Berlin, 11, at left, guides a blindfolded Connie DeMercurio and her blind father, Dan Berlin, during training for the 2012 Boston Marathon. Berlin is now president of the Fort Collins Running Club. / Dawn Madura/The Coloradoan**

When Windsor resident Connie DeMercurio was ready to pass the torch after presiding over the Fort Collins Running Club for two years, she did so knowing a strong board, bolstered by some enthusiastic new members, would carry on.

What she didn't know was her longtime running partner, Dan Berlin, would step up and agree to lead the running club.

"I was the last man standing," Berlin said with a smile. "No one else was ready to take on the job."

Berlin was happy to take over and delighted to pay back the Fort Collins running community for what they have done for him.

Relatively new to the sport, 43-year-old Berlin was struggling with the increasing loss of his sight five years ago when he decided to try running. Always athletic, he'd been involved with football and track in high school and frequented the gym regularly in later years.

"The longest I'd ever run since school days was a 3-mile jog to the gym," he said.

No longer able to drive or find his way comfortably around a grocery store, Berlin wanted to find a way to stay fit and release stress. He tried running on a bike path, because he could see the edges well enough and traffic was not an issue. It worked.

To keep running, he needed a goal. He set his sights on the 2009 Crossroads Half Marathon in Fort Collins and embarked on a 10-week intermediate training program.

Shortly before the race, Berlin realized if he ran solo he'd be a hazard — to himself and to others in the race. He could not see cones marking the course, and running in a pack would present an entirely new set of problems.

He called race director John Lonsdale and asked for help. Lonsdale sent out an email and in two days, Berlin had dozens of offers. DeMercurio emerged as most persistent and got the job.

That began a journey for the pair that throughout the years has included dozens of races from 5Ks to full marathons.

"Let's go," DeMercurio said moments after meeting Berlin for the first time. "There I was in my Crocs, figuring we'd have a bit of conversation before we hit the road, but no, Connie was ready to go the

moment she showed up at my house.”

They ran 2 miles that day. When they race together, an 18-inch nylon cord with a knot at each end tethers them to each other. DeMercurio runs ahead to warn Berlin of obstacles, and he wears a vest to let others know he can't see.

Berlin finished the Crossroads Half Marathon in 2 hours, 10 minutes. Goal met. He didn't plan to race again. But then he was invited to be on a relay team participating in the Denver Marathon.

“We had a blast,” he said. He followed that experience with the Heart Half Marathon in Loveland, which hooked him.

In October, Berlin plans a rim-to-rim-to-rim 46-mile jaunt in the Grand Canyon with three friends.

“The farthest I've ever run is 27 miles,” Berlin said. “I'm up for the challenge.”

Libby James has earned entry into the Colorado Running Hall of Fame.