

# DeMercurio 'strolls' across finish line thanks to role reversal

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Dennis Vanderheiden of Athletes in Tandem, left, pushes Connie DeMercurio and leads Dan Berlin across the finish line Sunday, as they complete the 10K race of the Colorado Marathon in Old Town. DeMercurio normally leads the blind Berlin during marathons, but he and Vanderheiden returned the favor to DeMercurio after she suffered a serious bike accident last week. / Randall Paetzold/For the Coloradoan



Written by  
**Stephen Meyers**

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In seven marathons run together, Connie DeMercurio has been the guide, the eyes and communicator for visually impaired runner Dan Berlin.

Saturday's 10K race at the Colorado Marathon was different. This time, a badly injured DeMercurio was in need of support.

"It was a bit of a role reversal today," said Berlin, who, along with Dennis Vanderheiden, pushed DeMercurio in a stroller for the 6.2-mile race as part of Vanderheiden's nonprofit Athletes in Tandem. "Sometimes, you need a little help. After all she's done for me, it was only fitting I'd help her. It was a beautiful morning."

A week prior to Sunday's races in Old Town, DeMercurio suffered a bicycling accident east of Fort Collins on Larimer County Road 13. Turning into a neighborhood, DeMercurio grabbed for her water bottle in the cage attached to the bike frame. The bottle stuck, jarring her forward. DeMercurio couldn't un-clip from her pedals in time and she went down with the bike, smashing the right side of her body on the pavement.

Her shoulder in severe pain and bleeding, DeMercurio suffered a third-degree separation in her right shoulder, fractured elbow, fractured hip, broken left thumb and multiple scratches above her right eye.

The Windsor resident and president of Fort Collins Running Club was rushed to the Medical Center of the Rockies for surgery. Wires were placed in her arm and screws in her hip. She has several stitches above her right eye. She was released from the hospital on Wednesday. On Thursday, she got an idea.

"I got this unbelievable email on Thursday evening, asking what I was doing on Saturday," Berlin said. "I just told her I was going to Old Town to watch the finish of the marathon and asked, 'What do you have in mind?'"

DeMercurio had racing in mind.

"Sometimes you're the pusher, sometimes you're the one being pushed. My husband (Doug) was pushing me in the wheelchair when I thought I should ask Dennis if he could push me in a

stroller on Sunday. I wanted to race," DeMercurio said.

At most weekend races, you'll find Vanderheiden pushing a kid in a stroller for Athletes in Tandem. He happily accepted to push DeMercurio, who has run several races with Athletes in Tandem.

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**Xplore reporter Stephen Meyers covers the outdoors and recreation for the Coloradoan. Follow him on Twitter [@stemeyer](#) or Facebook.com/meyersreports.**