

# HE DID IT



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**Suffering from blisters, Keith Patten (second from left) crosses the finish line of the A1A Marathon in Florida with the aid of personal trainers Jerry Lockwood (left) and Mike Sartorius of VIP Fitness and Patten's wife, Debbi. Keith Patten, who once weighed 400 pounds, lost almost 140 pounds in preparation for the race.**



# Patten fights through intense heat, bleeding blisters to finish marathon

By JANE PETERSON

Of The Oakland Press

**P**ain is temporary, but quitting is forever." Those seven words of encouragement sent to him by a friend — combined with the overwhelming support of friends, family and even strangers who had heard about his story — helped Keith Patten overcome scorching heat and bleeding blisters to finish the A1A Marathon in Fort Lauderdale, Fla., on Feb. 17.

With his wife, Debbi, by his side, Patten crossed the finish line after an exhausting 8:19:51.

"I had tears in my eyes. My wife had tears in her eyes. There were a lot of wet eyes," said the 45-year-old Clarkston resident.

Crossing the finish line was a personal achievement for Patten, who first laced up his running shoes a year ago after friends laughed at the idea of him running a marathon. In fact, one even commented, "I'll bet you couldn't run across the street."

At the time, Patten weighed nearly 400 pounds and had never run a marathon.

That was then. This is now.

Patten dropped a total of 137 pounds and works out regularly at VIP Fitness in Clarkston with personal trainers Jerry Lockwood and Mike Sartorius. He has completely changed the way he eats and views food, and his doctor has

taken him off blood pressure medication.

## The history

Busy at 24/7 Limousine & Ground Transportation Inc. in Clarkston, where he serves as president and co-owner, Patten said his weight simply got away from him over the years. However, once a friendly bet was made with friends that he would lose a specific amount of weight and finish the marathon in 5:30:00, he registered for the race and made a plan to drop the pounds.

What he quickly discovered is that he wasn't in this journey alone. After e-mailing marathon officials with a question about the course, Patten explained what his intentions were and Exclusive Sports Marketing, organizers of the A1A Marathon, put him in touch with a personal trainer and Dr. Janet Brill, a nutritionist, author and marathon runner. They designed a plan for him, and Patten checked in with Brill once a week.

Patten also had plenty of support from his wife and their 6-year-old daughter, Mackenzie, his personal trainers at VIP Fitness and a huge circle of friends who accompanied him to Florida for the marathon.

In the beginning, Debbi said she didn't think Keith knew what he was taking on.

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# MARATHON

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He couldn't have anticipated what the marathon itself would bring, either.

## The race

By 5:30 a.m. the day of the marathon, it was already an uncomfortable 74 degrees in Fort Lauderdale. During the day, temperatures climbed into the 80s, not necessarily ideal conditions for participating in a 26.2-mile marathon.

"I was sweating a little before the race," said Patten. "This day was just smoldering."

Undeterred, he lined up at the starting point and planned to complete the marathon in 5:30:00. He said he was right on target the first hour, coming in about seven or eight minutes ahead of schedule. Then, around the 6-mile mark, his foot began to hurt and blisters formed. By the 10-mile mark, there was blood on the top of his shoes.

Debbi had completed the

half-marathon and heard about her husband's challenges. Even though she has a bad knee, she joined him for the last 11 miles of the marathon, a show of support that Keith credits with giving him the push he needed to accomplish his goal.

Those last miles were tough for both of them, but they kept on going even when all the other runners before him had crossed the finish line and race officials had begun packing up.

"I don't cry very easily, but I saw the finish line and we said, 'Let's run it,' and grabbed each other's hands and started running," said Debbi. "It was so emotional. I just started crying."

Race organizers agreed that Patten's story was compelling.

"What Keith did was truly a test to the human spirit, his ability to set forth on this life-altering challenge is truly remarkable," Chris Laskey, Fort Lauderdale A1A Marathon race director, said in an e-mail. "He has done something unforgettable in his unflinching determination to finish the 26.2 miles. It is something I will always remember and something for

him to be truly proud of."

## Back home

Although finishing the marathon was an awesome experience, Patten has no qualms about giving up his running days. "I'm officially retired from marathons," he said.

However, that doesn't mean he plans to resort to his old ways. While the friendly bet he made with his friends started Patten on his journey, winning became less and less of a priority over time as improving his health became his main goal.

In the end, Patten said he just about broke even on the bet. In the weeks leading up to the race, his friends realized that he was going to accomplish the weight goal portion of it and wanted him to be strong for the marathon. However, Patten didn't finish the marathon in the agreed-upon time to win the other part of the bet.

He plans to continue his workouts and healthful diet, saying that this has been a lifestyle change, not just a quick fix

"In a nation bursting at the seams, Keith is a role model for the millions of overweight Americans looking for the secret to weight loss success," Brill said in a statement. "Extraordinary accomplishments are rarely achieved without dedication, hard work and

huge personal sacrifice. He is truly an extraordinary person and I am extremely fortunate to have had the opportunity to have worked with Keith and hopefully helped him to lose the weight and get on the road to better health and a longer, happier life."

While he lost the weight, Patten said he gained insight — and added years to his life.

"He overcame what most people would have given up on," said Debbi.

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