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Dashing for diabetes D.C. man to run coast to coast for medical research

by Paula Amann

News Editor

Jason Gross has a dream as huge as the United States. Gross, 27, plans to step off from New York's Central Park July 4 in a cross-country run to the Santa Monica pier in California.

It's not only a fitness challenge for this trade association professional, who is due to quit his job April 30 for two full months of training.

In the course of his mega-marathon, the District resident means to raise some \$100,000 for the American Diabetes Association.

His grandfather died of complications linked to type 2 diabetes, after losing both legs to amputation, and another relative was recently diagnosed with the disease.

"I think about giving back," said Gross, who grew up going to Reform Temple Beth Zion in Buffalo, N.Y. "By doing it for ADA and for *tzedakah*, it will be so much more meaningful."

When he shared his goal with college friend Keren Mandell, she says she could not quite grasp the idea.

"I was *kvelling*," said Mandell of Takoma Park. "I almost didn't know how to wrap my mind around it."

Mandell, 30, who developed type 1 diabetes as a child, says she still finds it "overwhelming, the fact that he would want to do this to help people like me."

A development professional in the Jewish community, she says she's been helping Gross raise funds for his

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philanthropic journey.

"Almost every part of my life has been improved due to research" on diabetes, said Mandell, citing the advent of portable blood sugar monitors and insulin pumps.

Mandell herself ran the Dublin marathon three years ago with a friend on behalf of ADA. Together, they garnered some \$8,000 for the nonprofit.

Still, the trek that Gross contemplates stands out among the usual fund-raisers for the group, says ADA's Anthony Leongini, a market manager in its Washington office.

"This is a pretty amazing thing -- not only from the standpoint of the physical requirements ... but the fact that he's trying to raise \$100,000," said Leongini.

Gross, who now calls running "one of my absolute favorite things to do," didn't gravitate to track and field early on. Indeed, the 5-foot-10-inch runner admits to being "chunky" as a teenager. During his sedentary college years, Gross saw his weight balloon to 250 pounds.

That's when he laced up his running shoes.

"I couldn't think of a better way to lose some weight," said Gross, who saw his weight shrink to 155 pounds. Since his jogging debut, he says he has completed a half-dozen marathons.

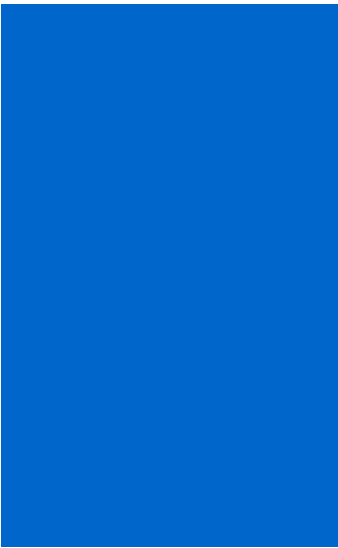
"I'm not a super-athlete; I'm a regular guy," he explained. "Anyone can make changes and just needs to be committed."

But, it's fair to say, not everyone can run some 3,300 miles across the continent.

In preparation for this feat, Gross has been pounding pavements up to 40 to 50 miles a week, a regimen he hopes to double over the next two months of intensive training.

"I really do feel lucky that it did become more than a chore," said Gross, who rhapsodizes about running as "meditative," even "relaxing."

He says he decided to run cross-country now, while he's single and without other commitments. The entire journey is slated to take five to six months.



Asked how those around him have reacted to his plans, Gross reports a mixed response.

"Most people think I'm crazy, but most have been supportive," he said. "I couldn't do this without the support of friends and family."

*For details of Jason Gross' project, readers may check the Web site [www.diabetesrun.com](http://www.diabetesrun.com).*

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