

## FITNESS

# Run, have fun and support an array of worthy causes

BY MATIAS OCNER  
AND CRYSTAL CHEW  
mocner@MiamiHerald.com

Alexandra Benitez, 25, used to observe people running races for causes like HIV and cancer, but she never really thought much about it.

Diagnosed with Hodgkin's lymphoma and large B-cell lymphoma on Nov. 27, 2012 and cleared the same day the following year, Benitez now had a new outlook on life and running.

"I've lost a couple friends to cancer," said Benitez, who is training for her first half-marathon with the Leukemia & Lymphoma Society's Team in Training group. She will be running the Walt Disney World Half Marathon on Jan. 7.

"When I'm running, I have these people in my mind and I'm thinking they didn't make it and I need to find a cure," she said.

• **For more information on The Leukemia & Lymphoma Society's Team in Training, visit [teamintraining.org](http://teamintraining.org).**

Here are some other organizations in South Florida that give back through fitness.

## HUNTINGTON'S DISEASE TRIATHLON

Debbie Gomberg envisions a day where there will be a cure for Huntington's disease, an inherited disorder that causes the progressive breakdown and degeneration of nerve cells in the brain.

"I'm in for life," said Gomberg, whose late father suffered from the disease. Because it is hereditary, her sister is now suffering as well.

"Being physically fit really makes an impact on your life," said the marathoner and triathlete.

To raise money for research, Gomberg, who is the president and co-founder of the South Florida chapter of Huntington's Disease Society of America, put on a triathlon that takes place at Larry

and Penny Thompson Park in Richmond West.

"What's really special is that 100 percent of all the proceeds go directly to research," said Gomberg, who is also the director of safety at FirstService Residential, a property management company. "Nobody is paid. We are all volunteers."

The event takes place every July and raised about \$45,000 this year. Previously, it has collected up to \$80,000.

• **For more information on The Huntington's Disease Triathlon, visit [huntingtonsdiseasefl.org](http://huntingtonsdiseasefl.org).**

## DOLPHINS CYCLING CHALLENGE

Dolphins Cycling Challenge, an event launched by the Miami Dolphins organization in 2010 when former player and sports radio commentator Jim "Mad Dog" Mandich was diagnosed with cancer, will take place Feb. 7 and 8.

The two-day event, which has 10 rides to choose from and a 5k run/walk, has traditionally taken place in November, but it was pushed back this year so players, coaches and operational staff can participate.

"It's been an impossibility when you have it in the middle of the Dolphins' season," said Michael Mandich, son of Jim Mandich and CEO of DCC.

The event is going into its fifth year, and has raised about \$7 million for Sylvester Comprehensive Cancer Center, the cancer treatment and research hub of University of Miami Health System.

"All of it stays here in South Florida," said Mandich who adds that the mission is to build a healthier and better community. "It's probably one of the most fun events ever."

• **For more information on Dolphin Cycling Challenge, visit [ridedcc.com](http://ridedcc.com).**



NICOLE PRITCHETT/ IPADS FOR SOLDIERS

**WALK A MILE IN THEIR BOOTS:** iPads for Soldiers aims to bring overseas soldiers closer to their families and loved ones, by collecting donations to purchase iPads for them.

## NATIONAL MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS SOCIETY

After being diagnosed with multiple sclerosis two years ago, 33-year-old Hasina Roach began to see her health deteriorate.

She had trouble remembering things, would stutter frequently and sometimes couldn't pronounce words. During a six-day hospital stay last November, Roach made a decision.

"It was either get up and do something, or stay in the bed and be depressed," said Roach, who sometimes uses a cane when she walks.

Roach sought help from the National MS Society of South Florida Chapter, which recommended she join the group's wellness center.

Now she visits the center weekly and participates in creative writing, meditation and yoga classes.

That is the kind of result Karen Dresbach, president of the National MS Society of South Florida for the past 15 years, likes to see.

For Dresbach, raising awareness and funding is key to helping battle the disease. The nonprofit's most successful event is its annual Bike MS, a 50- to 150-mile bike ride that raises over \$1 million.

• **For more information on the**

**National MS Society of South Florida Chapter or the Bike MS, visit [nationalmssociety.org](http://nationalmssociety.org)**

## SUSAN G. KOMEN RACE FOR THE CURE

Over 16,000 participants raced in a sea of pink through Bayfront Park on Oct. 18 to complete Susan G. Komen's Race for the Cure 5K in order to help generate funds to combat breast cancer through research.

Now in its 19th year, the 5K race was organized by the Miami/Ft. Lauderdale Komen affiliate, which aimed to raise \$1 million in donations.

"The energy was phenomenal and you can't even understand it until you've been there and you've lived it," said Cathy McCarthy, executive director of the affiliate. "It was an amazing day."

The money collected during the race helps sponsor breast cancer programs throughout Miami-Dade, Broward and Monroe counties.

• **For more information on Susan G. Komen, visit [komenmiaftl.org](http://komenmiaftl.org).**

## IPADS FOR SOLDIERS

When Capt. Wesley Pritchett was deployed in 2010 to one of Af-

ghanistan's most dangerous combat regions, his sister, Nicole Pritchett, would send him care packages filled with magazines, candies and other goodies.

After two months, his sister decided to fill an iPad with music, photos and apps to save space.

"A lot of the guys stationed in remote outposts are carrying these backpacks that weigh 50 to 80 pounds and can't bring books, music or any other forms of entertainment with them," said Pritchett, a board member at iPads for Soldiers.

On Nov. 9, iPad for Soldiers will be hosting Walk A Mile In Their Boots, a 1-mile walkathon, through Key Biscayne's Village Green Park to raise funds and continue buying iPads for overseas servicemen and women.

More than 40 teams have registered. Each will be led by a volunteer wearing a pair of combat boots donated by U.S. soldiers.

"They live in the boots," said Pritchett, who believes the event is a way to bring together veterans with the community. "The boots are these soldiers' lifelines."

• **For more information on iPads for Soldiers or the walkathon, visit [ipadsforsoldiers.org](http://ipadsforsoldiers.org).**