



Running a marathon a day for a cause

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Wayne resident Paul Mathison, a 51-year-old businessman and cancer survivor, completed his lap around Pennsylvania last week. It was a 1,022 mile odyssey that amounted to running 26.2 miles a day for 39 straight days and was also an attempt to alert state residents to the importance of the legislative redistricting process just beginning that will re-draw political boundaries across Pennsylvania and the rest of the country.

But what was it like – just the running – from Wayne to Pittsburgh, north to Erie, back east again to Scranton, the south to Philadelphia with just a short jog left to return to Wayne?

Mathison consented to an interview at downtown Wayne's Gryphon Café one morning last week to talk about the run and his cause, which continues, "like oxygen," he said, "for another six to eight month in Pennsylvania and across America."

Talking about the run with Mathison is never very far from talking about redistricting or "reapportionment," the official name for dividing voters up into equal-numbered groups.

The deadline for redistricting: "December is the targeted deadline." His goal for the run: "to exert pressure, to put a spotlight on the redistricting process going on in Harrisburg."

Or else, as Mathison suggested, his book-not-yet-to-be might be titled "How to lose five pounds on 8,000 calories a day."

"The toughest part was traversing the Appalachian Mountain chain, twice, in each direction, plus the rain, cold and wind [plus] pushing a 70-pound [jogging stroller loaded

with his gear] boulder.” The distance he ran each day was often dictated by “finding shelter for the night.”

Mathison left Wayne on April 1 in snow showers. Half-way around the state, in Erie, there was still occasional snow and, on the side of every road he ran along, the highway-grit accumulation of a long winter, which could make his footing and pushing the jogging stroller difficult. And there was the “constant high-decibel noise” of traffic often passing within a foot or so of him.

“I saw spring come out in Northeast Pennsylvania and caught a wave of pollen [when I arrived] in Philadelphia,” Mathison said. That was on a Sunday when he somehow merged with a crowd of people on North Broad St. “dressed in pink, for the [Komen]cause [5k run on May 8]. I [also] stopped at the Art Museum for a picture with Rocky. It’s become [more] difficult to get to the Liberty Bell.”



Along the way Mathison was on the news. Running through towns, he said, he often stopped at newspaper offices to tell reporters what he was doing. The Kane Republican, The Corry Journal and The Towanda Daily Review reported his progress. The NBC-TV affiliate in Erie interviewed him. CNN caught up with him twice, in Chambersburg and again just before Wellsboro.

“I ran with the reporter for 20 minutes,” Mat[h]jison said. “Then we sat on a guard rail for a more extensive interview.”

Mathison ran with an assortment of devices to keep in contact with his supporters and the media. He updated his Facebook and Twitter accounts daily, but “the GPS was the biggest hit ever,” he said. The device allowed followers and the press to find him during any part of the run.

CNN is planning a documentary on gerrymandering to air later this year. Mathison thinks he might be part of it.

He learned to milk the opportunity. “I got a story here, man,” he would say, and “I got more assertive than that at the Scranton Times at 6 p.m.” Later, “The Daily News (phillynews.com) would have an article on May 10.”

The media exposure turned into “Hey, I’ve just been on TV. Is a comp room possible?” as

Mathison looked for a place to stay overnight.” It worked at the Bradford Inn bed and breakfast in Towanda.

Mathison’s impromptu appearances at lawmakers’ offices across the state “dealt mainly with staff members, the organization of the political leadership.” Those “who had reached out to us in support of redistricting reform a year ago [included] York County Representative Eugene DiPasquale, a democrat, and Chambersburg Republican Senator Rich Alloway, my bi-partisan coalition of two,” he said. And there were “ward leaders and committee people” to talk to as well. Mathison also said he had talked often with Rep. Greg Vitali (D-166), also a runner, about redistricting.

Mathison estimates that he talked to “more than 500 people, less than 1,000” people along the way, always “looking for a sign that they’re receptive. The hook? ‘Where’s the baby?’”

“Let me tell you what I’m doing,” he would reply. “This is about cleaning up politics a bit.” It was an effective line.

“Good luck,” was a frequent response, or better, “What do you mean by that?”

“Sometimes I got an earful,” Mathison said, but making the point that “I was non-partisan and independent [helped]. Make a good impression, move on, and let whatever bubble-up.” He called it his “Johnny Appleseed approach.”

There was also the bear.

“It was about eight miles west of Wellsboro. I’m going with the traffic. I hear a rustle. It’s a big black bear near me with two smaller ones. We all ran in different directions. [After that] I was more reluctant to camp out – ever.”

At Republican Senate leader Joe Scarnati’s (R-25) office in Wellsboro a bit later, a Scarnati staffer explained, “That’s Agnes and her cubs.” At least it was a local bear.

Scarnati and Speaker of the House Sam Smith (R-66) recently appointed Senate Majority Leader Dominic Pileggi (R-9), House Majority Leader Mike Turzai (R-28), Senate Democratic Leader Jay Costa (D-43), and House Democratic Leader Frank Dermody (D-33) to serve on the 2011 Legislative Reapportionment Commission. Later, the Pennsylvania Supreme Court appointed President Judge Emeritus Stephen J. McEwen Jr. as the fifth member of the commission.

Mathison thinks the commission’s make-up is “encouraging. Transparency and

compactness, public input and sufficient time [are all needed for a] reapportionment that must be approved by the legislature and signed by the Governor. So, put the spotlight on the process in real time. We'd like to have access to [the commission's] draft maps in real time [as a] way of measuring success."

Mat[h]ison is a graduate of Purdue University and the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania. He runs his own business, a consulting and management firm, pjmathison, that also does government lobbying and government consulting. The PennUltimate Run was supported by its staff and by volunteers. Its expenses were paid by supporters, for both the run itself and also its outreach and education aspects. Mathison lives in Wayne with his wife. Passing through Bethlehem, he stopped for a visit with his son, a student at Lehigh University.

Mathison wanted to acknowledge and thank local supporters. Radnor Middle School principal Anthony Stevenson had planned to have Mathison start his run by jogging a lap with an RMS gym class (scratched due to weather); Radnor High School track coach Tom Flanagan loaned Mathison a PennUltimate baton; High Road Cycles in Wayne gave him bike-shop expertise applicable to stroller tires (no flats occurred); Radnor Township's Tammy Cohen helped get the word out; the Radnor Police, who thought initially that traffic control might be necessary, were just fine; Pat the Barber gave Mathison the "official haircut"; and Bateman-Gallagher American Legion Post 668 commander Marty Costello, gave his consent to start and finish the run at the Wayne War Memorial and also supplied a letter of introduction for Legion and VFW posts wherever Mathison might find them crossing the state.

Mathison's father, later a Presbyterian minister, was a World War II veteran. An uncle "didn't make it back." [At Bateman-Gallagher] Marty introduced me two weeks before [the run, and I] became a member of the Sons of the American Legion." At "at least two dozen American Legion and VFW posts, I stopped and introduced myself as involved in a patriotic cause."

What's next?

"I'm willing to run to Disney World," Mat[h]ison said. The thought had crossed his mind as he got closer to the finish of his PennUltimate lap around Pennsylvania.

Right now, "there are several hundred e-mail and phone messages" that he needs to respond to. After that's done and Pennsylvania's reapportioning effort produces compact, un-gerrymandered political districts, all Paul Mathison will need to run to Orlando, apparently, is a good cause.