

Promoting healthier lives

By Colleen Kane
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Tony Reed points to the numbers distributed by the American Heart Association during Black Heritage Month.

Forty percent of African-American women and 41 percent of African-American men have cardiovascular disease, with a 1.5 percent greater rate of heart disease death than Caucasians because of higher blood pressure. Of African-Americans, 68.3 percent of women and 58.4 percent of men are overweight, and 46 percent of men and 57.1 percent of women are sedentary, "with no leisure-time physical activity." Reed also points out figures from the American Diabetes Association that state that 11.7 percent of African-Americans have diabetes.

Reed is determined not to be one of those numbers, so he puts up a big number of his own - 65, as in marathons run.

Reed, a 49-year-old Dallas CPA, college accounting teacher, Texas Instruments IT consultant and executive director of the National Black Marathoners' Association, will run his 66th marathon Sunday at the Flying Pig Marathon. After reaching his goal of running 50 marathons by his 50th birthday a couple years early, he is running a marathon a month during his 50th birthday year, including one July 3 in Australia - his 50th birthday (July 2 in the U.S.).

The Flying Pig will be his seventh marathon in seven months, all in different states.

Distance runner Reed's individual, collective goals lead him to Cincy

National Black Marathoners' Association

What: An organization created in December to encourage black Americans to pursue a healthy lifestyle through long-distance running.

Founder: Tony Reed of Dallas.

Members: About 175 in 18 states, according to Reed.

Events: Meeting at this September's Lewis and Clark Marathon in St. Charles, Mo.

Fees: None, although people are en-

couraged to donate to the scholarship fund, which will award scholarships to high school seniors who participate in running events longer than 1,500 meters. (Deadline for application is May 15.)

Visit: Blackmarathoners.org

Others: The Avondale Running Club, which coordinates weekend runs, monthly meetings and a Flying Pig water station.

Visit avondalerunningclub.com

It's all part of his way to stay healthy. As a child, Reed was diagnosed with glucosuria, a condition where glucose is found in the urine. Doctors told him that by age 20 he would probably have to take insulin. As a high school student, Reed worked with a cook at a barbecue restaurant that lost an eye and a leg to diabetes.

"As a high school student, it scared the living daylights out of me," Reed said.

So he began to focus on staying active, playing sports in high school and then running his first marathon in 1982. He has yet to take insulin.

Now he's hoping to help other African-Americans. He founded the NBMA after meeting other runners at a national conference for the Black Data Processing Associates.

"We talked about the fact that many of us had medical issues that led us to running," Reed said. "None of us wanted to experience those things, so we'd try to go running three or four days a week."

The idea for a national organization that would promote healthy living through distance running was born and began to take shape this December.

"We want to get more African-Americans involved in a healthy lifestyle, to turn off the television," Reed said. "There's a lack of involvement in fitness activity. There's the idea that when people get out of high school and college instead of participating in sports, they watch sports."

The NBMA has already gained support in 18 states with official membership for the no-dues orga-

nization nearing 200, with an average age of 43, Reed said.

They plan to meet in September at the Lewis and Clark Marathon in St. Charles, Mo., where they will wear the same color jersey to help inspire others.

But Reed also wants more. Recently, he returned to his hometown for the Spirit of St. Louis Marathon, which ran by the site of the housing projects in which he grew up. As he ran by, a group of young black children started running with them.

"I thought if we could somehow instill fitness in the minds of young kids. If they see us out there, then as they get older they will also want to stay active," he said.

So the NBMA has set up a fund that will award a scholarships to senior high school distance runners, promoting both fitness and education, Reed said.

The group has also talked to an educator in Washington D.C. about starting fitness programs in inner-city schools.

Until then, Reed keeps running, thinking of one of the many people he met in one of his many marathons along his journey.

"He said he stopped watching sports on television. He said, 'In the time I spend watching athletes on television, I can become my own athlete.' So whenever he wants to look at an athlete, he looks in the mirror," Reed said.

"There's too much worshipping the athletes on TV. We can be our own athletes."

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