

Couple runs to fight AIDS

BY ROSS FORMAN

Kinnier Lastimoso and Jennifer Cheng will celebrate their 10th wedding anniversary on May 18 and will be running the annual Copenhagen Marathon two days later, marking the 17th marathon each has run over the past 3-½ years.

They will be sporting red Team To End AIDS (T2) shirts for the 26.2-mile journey through the streets of Copenhagen, standard wardrobe for the couple that has lived in Chicago's Lakeview neighborhood since they got married.

They have been staunch T2 and AIDS Foundation of Chicago (AFC) supporters since their first race mile—at the Amsterdam Marathon in 2008. They have raised about \$25,000 for AFC through their running careers—and were recognized for their fundraising efforts in 2011 during a T2 pasta party before the Chicago Marathon.

"We support AFC because we want to raise awareness [for] the ongoing fight against HIV/AIDS, and we believe in the AFC's leadership in this fight: helping people in Chicago living with HIV/AIDS and working nationally and internationally to advocate regarding rights, healthcare and research," Lastimoso said. "In addition to helping fund the AFC's efforts, we appreciate being a part of T2 because it has helped us strengthen our relationship with each other, develop strong long-term friendships, and realize goals on the courses and in our daily lives."

Cheng added: "Marathon running has changed my life. I signed up to run [a] marathon in 2008 to stay in shape and cross [that] off my bucket list. I thought I would do it once, and then forget about it. I didn't expect to fall in love with running, to embrace its challenges and rewards so fully. Training with T2 taught me that a seemingly intimidating goal is attainable when, one, it is broken up into manageable portions and, two, individual success is also the result of a group effort."

Lastimoso, 35, works as an attorney for the law firm of Sedgwick LLP, specializing in products liability, trade practices and insurance coverage. Cheng, 33, is a designer and project manager at PGAI Design Partners, a commercial interior architecture firm.

"There are many marathon training programs, and several of them support charities," Lastimoso said. "We chose T2 because the AFC's mission is important and because the people supported by the AFC remain marginalized. We keep training with T2 because of that mission and because we see that T2 has a similar effect on others as it has had for us."

"T2 represents not only endurance training, but also people whom I cannot wait to see every weekend to catch up during our long runs and

speed work and who share a common goal."

Cheng, a member of the AFC Junior Board, added: "On some days, finding the motivation to get all your miles in can be difficult. In addition to the [T2] coaching, the long runs or track workouts on the weekends were a like an outing with friends. My favorite part of the morning was stretching together afterwards and exchanging training tips."

"Runners are such a diverse group of people. Since joining T2, I have befriended so many individuals from different professions, organizations, and cultural groups whom I never would have met otherwise. I am definitely a more well-rounded person since becoming a T2 runner."

This dynamic duo has run marathons in London, Berlin and throughout the U.S. When they hit the starting line in Copenhagen, that will be their sixth of 2012, already.

Goofy?

Yes—and they started the year in Orlando, Fla., completing the annual Walt Disney World Marathon Goofy Challenge, which consists of a 13.1-mile half marathon on Saturday, then a 26.2-mile marathon the next day.

"Some of our closest friends during the last few years have come through T2, and I cannot imagine our lives without those people and T2," Lastimoso said.

They mostly run every marathon, not to mention training runs leading up to race day, side by side. But Lastimoso's best-ever time is 3:46:50 while Cheng's best is 3:59:50. Naturally, both set their Personal Record (PR) at the same race—the 2010 Metro Health Grand Rapids Marathon.

Lastimoso also has run seven half marathons, while Cheng has completed eight.

The 2010 London Marathon was the favorite for each.

"We have been fortunate to visit London periodically, and I have loved the city since I was a teenager. In fact, it may be my favorite city other than Chicago," Lastimoso said. "Running through the city was wonderful. The crowds were some of the loudest I have ever witnessed, and the course ran past some of the major, historical sites. Running across the Tower Bridge was one of my favorite running moments."

Cheng added: "Since the majority of London marathons are charity runners, we could only secure spots through T2; it was a great feeling to be surrounded by like-minded athletes. The crowds were amazing; there wasn't an empty stretch of sideline anywhere on the entire course. When we ran past a cheering section of a nearby runner's charity, the crowds roared even louder; it felt like they were cheering for us as well. We have several friends who live in London, and they all turned out to support us

on race day. The course was great as well—the best sightseeing tour of one of my favorite cities—but all of the vocal love we got from our friends and complete strangers gave me the best feeling I've ever had as a runner."

The pair has run six marathons over the years on behalf of AFC: Amsterdam, Chicago, London, Grand Rapids, New York and Berlin.

"We started running with annual fundraising goals regardless of the number of races," Lastimoso said. "In theory, we have run all of [our races] on behalf of AFC."

"My dad was an avid runner when I was younger. I never appreciated the [training] he put in because I [then] did not enjoy running [and] did not share in his love of the sport. In 1996, he [finished] a marathon fast enough to qualify for the [prestigious] Boston Marathon. I [then] did not understand the prestige and history of the race, which was the 100th that year. After completing the Boston Marathon, he took time away from distance running, but stayed fit through other disciplines."

"After Jennifer and I started training to benefit the AFC more than a decade later, the three of us decided to run a half marathon together. As it turns out, my dad still had his running legs and good speed for his age, or any age really. We then set a goal that I would pace him to qualify for the Boston Marathon again. The first time we tried in 2009, he barely missed his qualifying time, but, at the 2010 Dallas White Rock Marathon, I successfully paced him to a Boston-qualifying time with less than 30 seconds to spare. It was wonderful to be able to share the success and the passion for the sport." The two have had plenty of other memorable moments in running shorts, too.

"Being a charity runner is really a testament to the fact that almost anyone can run a marathon or participate in an endurance event," Cheng said. "I've seen blind athletes running with guides and watched people 'who have never run for the bus' transform while training to complete 26.2 miles. But my favorite inspiration is father-and-son [duo of] Dick and Rick Hoyt of Team Hoyt, who have completed over 1,000 races—including 6 Ironman competitions—together."

Lastimoso and Cheng will be training with T2 again this summer, running with the red-clad crew along the lakefront.

"I think there is a misperception in the U.S. that HIV/AIDS is a disease that mostly affects gay patients," Cheng said. "I try to make my donors aware that domestically, infection rates are on the rise among heterosexuals; and worldwide, HIV/AIDS disproportionately affects women and children. I want people to know that the fight



Lastimoso and Cheng participate in a Las Vegas marathon. Photos by the couple

against HIV/AIDS is not a 'gay issue,' but rather, a human issue."

So the two will just keep running for T2.

Here is a look at the Marathon Slate for Kinnier Lastimoso and Jennifer Cheng, both of Chicago:

- October 19, 2008: ING Amsterdam Marathon
- October 11, 2009: Bank of America Chicago Marathon
- April 25, 2010: Virgin London Marathon
- October 17, 2010: Metro Health Grand Rapids Marathon
- November 7, 2010: ING New York City Marathon
- December 4, 2010: MetroPCS Dallas White Rock Marathon
- March 20, 2011: Honda LA Marathon
- May 7, 2011: Wisconsin Marathon
- September 25, 2011: BMW Berlin Marathon
- October 23, 2011: Solutia St. Louis Rock 'N' Roll Marathon
- December 4, 2011: Zappos.com Las Vegas Rock 'N' Roll Marathon
- January 7, 2012: Walt Disney World Marathon (as part of the Goofy Race and a Half Challenge)
- February 19, 2012: IMS Arizona Marathon in Phoenix
- February 26, 2012: Cowtown Marathon in Fort Worth
- March 18, 2012: Publix Georgia Marathon in Atlanta
- April 14, 2012: Carmel Marathon (in Indiana)
- May 20, 2012: Nykredit Copenhagen Marathon



Lastimoso and Cheng have participated in marathons worldwide, including in (left to right) Berlin, Chicago, London and New York.