

Local couple persevere in 140 mile triathlon

By Susan Roark
editor

The long and often lonely months of rigorous physical training finally paid off for Randy and Kathy Step of Livonia. The tanned, happy couple arrived home last weekend to the congratulations of family and friends.

The Steps, both 25, were coming back from Hawaii and the Ironman World Triathlon, an event billed "as the most grueling test of human endurance."

Graduates of Redford Union High School, the Steps finished the event — which included a 2.4-mile ocean swim, a 112-mile bicycle race and a 26.2-mile marathon — all in sequence and all in one day.

Kathy placed 18th among some 56 women and 257th overall with an unofficial time of 13 hours, 26 minutes and 33 seconds. This was only the third year that women have been included in the competition.

Randy completed the course in 12:57:22 (unofficial time). The Steps were among a dozen competitors from Michigan who took part.

Scott Tinley of San Diego won the event in a time of 9 hours, 19 minutes and 41 seconds.

THE TRIATHLON, which took place Feb. 6 on Kailua-Kona, the island of Hawaii, attracted nearly 600 participants from 41 states and six countries. Contestants ranged in age from 14 to 63 and came from a variety of backgrounds. About 90 percent of those who entered finished.

But the Steps, one of 10 married couples in the race, didn't just survive the triathlon. They are mighty proud of the times they posted.

"We didn't want to just finish — we wanted to finish well. I predicted my time would be 14:30. Kathy predicted hers at about 15 hours. We were thrilled," said Randy, who works as a funeral director in the family business, Charles R. Step Funeral Home in Redford Township.

Kathy is a registered nurse and works for the Visiting Nurses Association. She posted her best time (1:24) in the swimming competition which didn't surprise her because she was a member of the girls swim team at Redford Union High School. The bike course, however, presented Kathy with the toughest challenge of the day. It took her 7 hours and 47 minutes to complete the course. She ran the marathon in 4 hours and 15 minutes.

Randy's individual event times were: swimming, 1:37; bicycling, 7 hours; and running, 3:47.

THE STEPS are very athletic. They're avid marathon runners and race every other weekend during the summer. Last summer, they attended a running camp and they participated in two Michigan triathlons. (Kathy came in second overall in the Waterloo Triathlon in Jackson). They belong to the Livonia Family YMCA Pacers Club and "try to run in as many club races as possible."

Although the world triathlon is tough, it was training that presented the toughest challenge for the young couple.

They rode more than 100 miles a week on a bicycle track they rigged up in the kitchen of their Ramblewood Drive home. They never ran less than 50 miles a week — even in sub-zero temperatures. They swam one mile each day.

They originally planned to enter the world triathlon in 1983 but in October they changed their plans.

"I knew we could do well and I didn't think we could keep up the training pace until next year. In October we called and made reservations, got our applications and just quit doing everything else (except for our jobs) and trained," explained Kathy.

THEY ARRIVED in Hawaii Feb. 1. In the days preceding the event, the pair trained by repeating the routine they would experience on race day. That included eating and drinking the same foods (peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, Gatorade, raisins, bananas and oranges) that they would on race day.

At 4:30 a.m. Feb. 6, Kathy and Randy Step headed for the starting line. Randy had pancakes for breakfast but Kathy waited until the bicycle race to eat.

"I couldn't eat, I was too nervous. It's really something to look around and see some 500 perfect specimens of men and then there was me," she said laughing. Even Randy agreed that the sight of all those athletes and their fine-tuned physiques was a little intimidating.

"Marathon runners are usually tall and lean. Swimmers have chests that are huge and bikers have thighs the size of tires," said Randy, who is 5 feet, 8 inches tall and weighs 134 pounds. Kathy is 5 feet, 6 inches tall and weighs 120 pounds.

The ocean swim was the toughest part of the course for Randy.

"OCEAN SWIMMING is very different than pool or lake swimming. It was very rough water for first ¼ mile and there are so many people. It's a frightening experience and I kept thinking all

the salt water I swallowed would come back to haunt me with cramps in the bike race," said Randy.

The contestants entered the ocean at the Kailua Pier on Alii Drive at 7:30 a.m. and swam 1.2 miles to the turnaround point, a skill anchored 100 yards offshore. They swam around the boat and returned to the pier where they showered, dressed into biking clothes and began the 112-mile bike race through the black lava fields on Queen Kaahumanu Highway north to Hono.

Contestants then headed back to Kailua-Lana via the same highway, ending at the Kona Surf Hotel at Keahou Bay where they began the marathon. The turnaround near the Keshold Airport signaled the final leg of the race. Runners returned to Kailua to finish at the pier.

The bicycle race was Kathy's toughest challenge.

"It was very windy. It only took me three hours to reach Hono (the bike turnaround) and more than four hours to get back. And I was so worried about getting dehydrated. We were constantly sponging ourselves with water. We both drank more than 5 gallons of water during the bicycle race," said Kathy.

The Steps said they came across the finish line (Randy at 8:30, Kathy at 9 p.m.) feeling "a little too good."

"WE WERE a little conservative but then we'd never done this before," said Randy. "It was unexplored territory," interjected Kathy.

The fifth world triathlon marked the last time the race would be held in February. The event has been changed to October.

"That way people from the East and Midwest will have a better chance to train," explained Randy.

The Steps are planning to participate in the sixth world triathlon but they hope to find a sponsor or sponsors for the next trip. This year's trip cost the young couple \$3,000.

The pair agree the trip was a great athletic experience and a good time.

"It was great to get there and meet other people who'd been doing the same thing we had. I didn't feel we were crazy for doing what we did," said Kathy, referring to the months of training.

"Everyone connected with the race was very supportive," added Kathy. Before the race, the contestants were treated to a special dinner. After the race an awards banquet was held.

Before returning home, the couple took some time to relax and tour the islands. But they soon got tired of the easy life.

City Hall hoist

Employees of Farmington Hills' Building and Assessing Departments vacated their offices Friday, making way for workers to hoist the City Hall roof with 12-ton jacks, steel pipes and a crane. That enabled engineers to examine the sagging beams

and joists to see which ones could be reused in the roof's reconstruction. Action was delayed until Friday because officials disagreed on whether the roof should be rebuilt or repaired.

RANDY BORST/staff photographer

Hair care taught here

Little is known about the kinds of hair styles worn before 3,000 B.C., but archaeologists have found hairpins and combs that prove even prehistoric people were concerned with how they looked.

Vince Mileto, European- and American-trained hair stylist and owner of the Cutting Room in Brighton, will present a three-session class called on hair care from 7-9 p.m. on Tuesdays

beginning March 9 in Farmington Community Center.

Mileto will bring four hairdressers/trainers to each session who will work with students, giving individual instruction on how to keep hair looking its best between salon appointments, choosing proper equipment and methods for styling, and use of hair products.

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