

RECREATION CENTER

The Observer & Eccentric publishes the "Recreation Center" every Sunday in Sports. To submit results of competition, items for the Rec Roundup or local story ideas, call staff writer Chris Meyer at (248) 901-2589, fax him material at (248) 644-1314 or write to him at: The Observer & Eccentric Sports Department, 805 E. Maple, Birmingham, MI 48009.

A year to remember

Birmingham couple accomplishes inconceivable feat

BY CHRIS MEYER
STAFF WRITER

Just under two months into their adventure, Anthony Lopetrono and Nancy Broadbridge traveled to Seaside, Ore., for the Trail's End Marathon. Unfortunately, the married couple were subjected to the worst weather conditions possible — chilly temperatures, driving rain and gusty winds.

"I opened the zipper on my jacket to show my race number and I couldn't get the zipper back up," Lopetrono recalled, "so for the last quarter mile I was like a parachute."

The less-than-ideal setting in Oregon represented just one of many obstacles Lopetrono and Broadbridge would encounter on their ambitious quest to complete marathons (26.2 miles) in the 50 states and the District of Columbia in the same calendar year.

And they conquered every one. On Dec. 21, 1997, Lopetrono, 46, and Broadbridge, 44, lined up to run the Christmas Marathon in Olympia, Wash. Less than five hours after taking off from the starting line, the

dedicated duo from Birmingham had both crossed the finish line to conclude a remarkable trek across America.

"We actually did it, which looking back is kind of amazing. In the beginning of the year you figure you're going to miss one," Lopetrono said during a recent interview. "It was a lot of fun. A lot of the friends that we know have been sending us their congratulations."

"We were looking forward to quite an adventure," he added. "We figured it was going to be a lot of fun to see the whole country. We found out that people are pretty much the same — we were in a kind of narrow group of people insofar as we were all pretty much involved in running — and I think people are generally the same all over the country."

Lopetrono and Broadbridge, profiled in The Eccentric last September, are the first people to run a marathon in all 50 states and D.C. in the same year to the best of their knowledge. Their saga, triggered when they met members of the 50 States & D.C. Marathon Group during a marathon in Rhode Island in November 1996, officially began on Jan. 4 with the Charlotte Observer Marathon in Charlotte, N.C.

Lopetrono ran the 51 marathons in a splendid average time of 3 hours, 37 minutes, 23 seconds, despite experiencing a nagging hamstring injury in the middle of the year and some hip pain late in the year. Broadbridge, who had to overcome a bout of plantar fasciitis in September, clocked an equally noteworthy average time of 4:57:24.

"In the beginning I was not very sure about this," Broadbridge said. "I didn't think I would be able to run a marathon every weekend — let alone having to do ones on consecutive days — but then after I got into it the first month I just walked down my pace, did a little wailing and I found I could do just as good or better the next weekend. That's when I thought we could do this."

"I thought I'd be able to get into a system that I'd just maintain and I would be in shape for the marathons, but I never could," Lopetrono said. "If I did it again I probably could — I was getting better at it — but I just couldn't resist going fast."

Both admit they feel fortunate to have been healthy and relatively injury free during the year, albeit the occasional sore muscle or bothersome cold. Run-

ning that number of marathons is obviously a huge task, but the biggest challenge involved planning where and when to run. Five states offered just one marathon and 34 had only two, prompting the pair to run marathons two to three days apart on three occasions and two in one weekend three other times.

"It went pretty darn smooth for us, pretty darn smooth," Lopetrono said, "and I guess the company most responsible for that would be Northwest Airlines. It is amazing how on time they are and how they got us to where we had to go. I would say without them we wouldn't have done it."

"In the beginning I wasn't that confident that we would do this because too much was out of our control," he added. "I was confident that I could complete it as far as the physical aspect, but I wasn't confident that I could complete it in terms of would all the states offer a marathon and would we be able to get to them without having travel delays or cancellations."

"The biggest hurdle was the logistics of actually getting to the marathons. I would say if your goal was to just get to a marathon in every state in one year and stay there for five hours and leave...you might not be able to do that."

The couple estimates they logged approximately 70,000 air miles and the number of stories they could tell about airports

and plane changes alone would fill this entire page. But it's the satisfaction derived from planning and completing such a goal, seeing the country (Nancy has the pictures to prove it) and meeting new people that will be etched in their memories.

What's next for Lopetrono and Broadbridge? Well, they plan to

run 10 or so marathons this year, beginning with one in Ocala, Fla., on Feb. 1.

"It's more fun to travel and do a marathon and meet your friends there," Broadbridge said. "That's more fun than turning miles over on a treadmill like I've been doing lately because it's so cold outside."



Trophy time: Nancy Broadbridge (left) and her husband, Anthony Lopetrono, are shown here in Olympia, Wash., after completing the Christmas Marathon. The Dec. 21 event represented the final marathon for the Birmingham couple as they successfully completed marathons in all 50 states and the District of Columbia in 1997. The trophy was presented as a symbol of the accomplishment.

Marathon	State	Date	Lopetrono's time	Average time
Charlotte Observer	N.C.	Jan. 4, 1997	3:18:19	3:18:19
Houston Methodist	Texas	Jan. 12, 1997	3:25:30	3:25:30
Mardi Gras	La.	Jan. 18, 1997	3:12:55	3:28:02
Tallahassee	Fla.	Feb. 1, 1997	3:15:07	3:24:48
Caroline	S.C.	Feb. 1, 1997	3:14:09	3:22:40
Desert Classic	Ariz.	Feb. 15, 1997	3:19:43	3:22:10
Smoky Mountains	Tenn.	Feb. 22, 1997	3:08:34	3:19:48
Trail's End	Ore.	March 3, 1997	3:25:09	3:21:43
B & A Trail	Mid.	March 8, 1997	3:12:37	3:20:42
Shenrock	Va.	March 15, 1997	3:16:02	3:20:14
Maui	Hawaii	March 23, 1997	3:10:42	3:19:22
Hogeye	Ark.	April 6, 1997	3:23:24	3:10:42
Gleam City	Ohio	April 13, 1997	3:14:45	3:19:19
Longest Day	S.D.	April 19, 1997	3:45:07	3:21:01
Boston	Mass.	April 21, 1997	3:07:53	3:20:09
Lake County	Ill.	April 27, 1997	3:22:27	3:20:18
Great Potato	Idaho	May 3, 1997	3:23:35	3:20:28
Lake Geneva	Wis.	May 10, 1997	3:45:28	3:21:52
Sugarloaf	Maine	May 18, 1997	3:09:02	3:21:12
Wyoming	Wyo.	May 25, 1997	4:17:00	3:23:59
High Plains	Kan.	May 31, 1997	3:20:10	3:23:48
Governor's Cup	Mont.	June 7, 1997	3:50:00	3:25:00
Tee	N.M.	June 8, 1997	3:36:00	3:30:42
Hooder	Ind.	June 14, 1997	3:29:50	3:30:40
Grindstone	Minn.	June 21, 1997	3:38:29	3:31:47
Rainbow	N.Y.	June 29, 1997	3:29:12	3:31:41
San Francisco	Calif.	July 13, 1997	3:27:00	3:31:31
University of Otago	Iowa	July 19, 1997	4:04:50	3:32:43
Desert News	Utah	July 24, 1997	3:49:58	3:33:10
Sky Marathon	Colo.	July 27, 1997	3:27:11	3:37:08
Crytal Lake	Alaska	Aug. 9, 1997	3:24:24	3:37:40
Hempy's Classic	Alaska	Aug. 9, 1997	3:17:49	3:37:03
Silver State	Nev.	Aug. 24, 1997	3:56:11	3:37:38
Tipple	Miss.	Sept. 7, 1997	3:57:16	3:38:13
Blumack	N.D.	Sept. 6, 1997	3:13:21	3:37:30
Erlestone	Pa.	Sept. 14, 1997	3:13:44	3:36:50
East Lyme	N.H.	Sept. 21, 1997	3:25:07	3:36:31
New Hampshire	N.H.	Oct. 4, 1997	3:47:05	3:30:48
St. Louis	Mo.	Oct. 12, 1997	3:19:40	3:36:22
Green Mountain	N.J.	Oct. 18, 1997	3:51:46	3:30:45
Atlantic City	N.J.	Oct. 19, 1997	3:58:48	3:37:17
Marine Corp	D.C.	Oct. 26, 1997	3:22:18	3:36:50
Omaha Riverfront	Neb.	Nov. 2, 1997	3:50:00	3:37:14
Tula	Okla.	Nov. 2, 1997	3:22:21	3:36:25
Atlanta	Ga.	Nov. 8, 1997	3:23:37	3:36:08
Almost Heaven	W. Va.	Nov. 30, 1997	3:33:15	3:35:51
Kentucky	Ky.	Dec. 7, 1997	4:13:46	3:36:30
Dolanville	Pa.	Dec. 7, 1997	4:02:59	3:37:33
Rocket City	Ala.	Dec. 13, 1997	3:58:00	3:37:57
Christmas	Wash.	Dec. 21, 1997	3:08:48	3:37:23

Marathon	State	Date	Broadbridge's time	Average time
Charlotte Observer	N.C.	Jan. 4, 1997	4:41:00	4:41:00
Houston Methodist	Texas	Jan. 12, 1997	4:49:22	4:45:11
Mardi Gras	La.	Jan. 18, 1997	4:58:03	4:45:09
Tallahassee	Fla.	Feb. 1, 1997	4:41:23	4:42:42
Caroline	S.C.	Feb. 1, 1997	4:24:26	4:39:02
Desert Classic	Ariz.	Feb. 15, 1997	4:42:10	4:40:49
Smoky Mountains	Tenn.	Feb. 22, 1997	4:51:27	4:42:09
Trail's End	Ore.	March 3, 1997	4:38:32	4:40:16
B & A Trail	Mid.	March 8, 1997	4:39:31	4:41:32
Shenrock	Va.	March 15, 1997	4:48:47	4:40:19
Maui	Hawaii	March 23, 1997	4:48:47	4:41:00
Hogeye	Ark.	April 6, 1997	4:42:22	4:42:45
Gleam City	Ohio	April 13, 1997	4:14:42	4:45:02
Longest Day	S.D.	April 19, 1997	4:36:02	4:42:45
Boston	Mass.	April 21, 1997	4:39:23	4:44:07
Lake County	Ill.	April 27, 1997	4:47:30	4:44:19
Great Potato	Idaho	May 3, 1997	4:36:51	4:43:54
Lake Geneva	Wis.	May 10, 1997	4:33:58	4:43:54
Sugarloaf	Maine	May 18, 1997	5:14:47	4:45:26
Wyoming	Wyo.	May 25, 1997	5:14:47	4:45:26
High Plains	Kan.	May 31, 1997	4:37:08	4:43:52
Governor's Cup	Mont.	June 7, 1997	5:17:28	4:46:31
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Tipple	Miss.	Aug. 31, 1997	5:05:16	4:54:13
Blumack	N.D.	Sept. 7, 1997	5:04:28	4:54:28
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East Lyme	N.H.	Sept. 21, 1997	4:50:27	4:55:06
New Hampshire	N.H.	Oct. 4, 1997	4:49:37	4:54:58
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— Birmingham marathoner Nancy Broadbridge

The voice of public education

Modern schools equal better learning

Dorothy Florian is amazed at what she and other educators at Rawsonville Elementary School do for children despite the inferior, outdated and, in some ways, unhealthy building they work in.

Rawsonville, in Wayne County's Van Buren Public Schools, was the only elementary school that earned the 1996-97 Title I Distinguished School Award from the Michigan Department of Education. Scores on the Michigan Educational Assessment Program (MEAP) have soared over the past three years.

Yet Rawsonville—portions of which date to the 1930s—was not designed for today's children and the high-tech, team-oriented workplaces we must prepare them for.

Nor is it as safe or suitable as it should be. According to district officials, the roof, windows and walls leak; there's lead in the water and asbestos in the tiles; and raw sewage has backed up onto the playground.

"Some people say, 'Why do you need a new school? Look at what you're doing with what you've got,'" said Florian, a Title I teacher. "We love what we are doing and we work so hard. But just imagine what we could do for these children if we had better conditions."

The 467 children at Rawsonville aren't alone. More than 14 million children across the country and tens of thousands in Michigan are learning in difficult, if not deplorable, conditions.

That's partly because many of our nation's schools were hastily built more than half a century ago to serve baby boomers. Now, like many baby boomers themselves, the buildings are showing their age.

The average school building in the United States is 55 years old and in desperate need of repair, renovation or replacement, according to the U.S. General Accounting Office (GAO). Children in urban, suburban and rural schools alike are in buildings that have leaky roofs, crumbling walls, poor plumbing, environmental hazards—and too little space to handle current and projected population growth.

Michigan mirrors the nation, the GAO data shows.

- 80 percent of our schools need buildings repaired or upgraded to good condition.
- 52 percent have at least one substandard feature such as a roof, plumbing or electrical wiring.
- 61 percent cite at least one environmental problem such as high levels of lead in drinking water, or poor air quality, venti-

lation, heating or lighting.

- Enrollment from 1996 to 2006 is expected to increase by about 2,000 additional classrooms.

Safe, healthy and modern schools are as basic to student learning as quality teachers, good lessons and textbooks.

But in some of our schools students must learn algebra in classrooms so cold they need to wear a winter coat, get to class on time through halls so crowded they can barely move, learn about computers by drawing keyboards and pretending they are online.

These problems have historically been left to local districts to solve. But they have gotten so costly—\$200 billion to \$300 billion nationally—that districts can't solve them alone. Indeed, local bond issues for buildings and technology fail twice as often as they pass.

That's why the Michigan Education Association (MEA) is joining with the National Education Association (NEA) and the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) in a campaign to build public awareness of the problem and turn up the heat on Congress. Our representatives in Washington seem willing to spend billions of dollars on our nation's highways and water systems, yet they are neglecting our schools.

We, along with parents, business leaders and public school employees, must convince our representatives that our children are at least as important as our roads and sewers.

President Bill Clinton appears ready to try again to invest \$5 billion in federal money into bringing school buildings up to date. That's not enough, but it would be a good start. Last year, that proposal died in the budget process.

Our children can't wait any longer. Further delays would only increase the cost to all of us—in money, time and lost opportunities.

LaDonna Fogg, mother of a fourth-grader at Rawsonville, agrees. And she is running out of patience.

"So many politicians say they care about public education—well prove it," Fogg said. "My child has one chance at getting an education. She deserves better than overcrowded classrooms and leaky roofs."

mea

Michigan Education Association