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Virginia Visionaries: Brooke Curran

BY CAROLINE KETTLEWELL
2:06 PM



Photo courtesy of Brooke Curran

- **The Visionary:** Marathon runner Brooke Curran, founder of the Alexandria-based RunningBrooke Fund.
- **The “Aha!” Moment:** Curran began running marathons after the events of 9/11 led her to take stock of her life. But running for personal bests didn’t give her a sense of purpose or motivation. Then one day, sitting at a stoplight in a working-class neighborhood near her home, she watched a young mother, still in her work uniform, struggling to walk home while pushing a stroller slung with plastic bags. Inspired to help kids and families, Curran decided she could make running her mission, dedicating herself to raising \$1 million to support at-risk children.
- **The Vision:** Set audacious running goals to raise money to support programs for healthy, active kids and school readiness in her Alexandria community.

When Curran took up running in her late 20s, it was “just to get out of the house,” to give herself some alone time in the busy life of raising three young daughters with her husband, Christopher, an attorney. Today Curran, 46, with two of her daughters in college and the third in high school, more than gets out of the house. For the RunningBrooke Fund, she runs a marathon every month. She has run in Alabama and Africa, in Big Sur and Berlin. She has run on the Great Wall of China and in wind-swept Antarctica. Since 2009, Curran has run more than 70 marathons, one in every state in the U.S. and one on every continent in the

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world, along with all the majors: New York, London, Boston, Berlin and Chicago. And she is committed to running 100 and beyond.

Paying her own expenses, she asks others to “join the team” and support her efforts by giving back to the community. To date, RunningBrooke has raised more than \$300,000 in grants for nearly two dozen Alexandria non-profits, in support of programs for early childhood education, tutoring, literacy, and for combatting childhood obesity and promoting healthy, active play. The list of organizations RunningBrooke has benefited includes Girls on the Run, the Reading Connection, the Center for Alexandria’s Children (fighting child abuse) and the Childhood Obesity Action Network.

“We focus on early childhood education and anything that can get a child outside and moving,” says Curran. “Studies link physical activity with doing well in school. So it is a whole-child approach, so the child is healthy, ready and prepared to learn by the time that child reaches kindergarten.”

Curran is particularly excited by a major project, planned for next summer in partnership with the city of Alexandria, to rehabilitate an underutilized playground. Hundreds of volunteers will assist with the project—from outreach to design to implementation—and the revitalized playground will be available not only for families but also for some of the early childhood programs RunningBrooke helps support.

Not every step in the RunningBrooke journey has been painless. In 2009, not long after she began her quest, Curran was diagnosed with asthma (now successfully controlled with medication). There were the 40 mile-per-hour winds in Antarctica. The blazing heat and the smog in China. And with marathon after marathon, month after month, there are always those days when, standing at the starting line, she finds herself thinking, “Do I have to run another 26.2 miles?”

“That’s when I think of the kids,” says Curran. “The challenges they face are so much harder. They inspire me—seeing them succeed.”

Curran knocked out her seventh continent (Africa) and 50th state (Iowa) last year. But with nearly 2,000 marathon miles behind her (including one she ran on a treadmill), Curran is not pausing to rest but is pushing on to her new goal: 100 marathons and \$1 million (and an Ironman competition thrown in the mix). “We want to create an endowment,” she says, “so that we can continue to partner and prepare kids in the future and so this doesn’t all depend on my legs.”

What’s more, she is considering how she might encourage others to follow the RunningBrooke example. “Everyone can be a philanthropist,” she says. “Set out to do something that’s meaningful to you. Don’t be afraid of how to do it. Just start.” RunningBrooke.org

Find All the Visionaries here:

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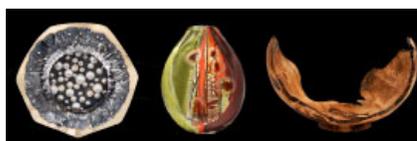
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