

GCSANC Member Joel Ahern— A Marathon Man for Charity

By Emmy Moore Minister

It's all about giving back. Just ask Northern California Golf Course Superintendent Joel Ahern who ran a 26.2-mile marathon to raise funds for the Leukemia & Lymphoma Society. A good friend of Aherns approached him with the idea of running The LaSalle Bank Chicago Marathon, which immediately caught his interest. Besides the challenge of the run, the involvement with the Leukemia & Lymphoma Society also appealed to Ahern.

Golf Course Superintendent by day, and runner by night, Ahern contacted a mentor through the Northern California Leukemia & Lymphoma Society to find out more about the Team in Training Program that helps prepare runners in mastering marathons. According to the association, over 16,000 Northern California residents have been trained to run or walk a marathon, or participate in cycling, mountain biking, or triathlon events. Before long Ahern was participating in the Team in Training Program (TNT) which takes runners step by step through the marathon training and fundraising process.

"I was excited about the opportunity to run in my first marathon while raising funds for such a great cause," states Ahern, GCSANC Member and Class "A" Golf Course Superintendent at San Jose Country Club, located in the heart of Silicon Valley. "I originally thought that running the race and raising funds would be difficult to accomplish," admits Ahern, "but by staying organized and with the help of my family, and friends and club members, I was able to achieve my goal." However, he still admits the marathon training was not an easy task. "It took plenty of hard work and determination," claims Ahern.

The fundraising efforts also required a commitment. Ahern set a goal to raise \$3600 for the cause. With the help of family, friends and dedicated members at San Jose Country Club, Joel not only met the goal but exceeded it by raising over \$3800 for the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society. The good news is, more than 75 percent of what is raised by the participants goes directly to



GCSANC Member Joel Ahern with friend, Raquel Zamura at the finish line in Chicago

research and patient services for those faced with the challenges of Leukemia.

Fundraising and training continued for months leading up to The LaSalle Bank Chicago Marathon. The honorees in the program, whom the funds support, were an inspiration to Ahern and his fellow training team members. "At each weekly training practice and weekend run the honorees were there cheering us on," claims Ahern. "They even took time to share some thoughts about the challenges they face with their illnesses." After hearing their personal stories, Ahern admits that marathon training did not seem nearly as difficult as before.

Kristen Laidlaw of San Jose was Ahern's special Team in Training Honoree. She is a twelve-year-old who was diagnosed with Acute Lymphocytic Leukemia in 1997 and has spent more time in and out of hospitals than one could ever imagine. But on the brighter side, when she is not supporting runners like Ahern through the Team in Training Program, she is attending middle school where she is involved in singing, dancing, and soccer. It's heartwarming to report that her condition is in remission at

this time. However, Kristen still continues to make regular visits to Stanford Hospital for required check ups and lab work.

Kristen served as an inspiration for Ahern as he completed the marathon in 4:35:15. "When I reached the finish line in Chicago, my body was tired and sore, but I was fulfilled, stated Ahern. "Just thinking about all the wonderful people I met from Team in Training and the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society made it all worthwhile. I felt very satisfied at what I had accomplished."

Just recently Ahern ran the San Diego Rock N' Roll Marathon in 4:06:11, beating his earlier record. He looks forward to running on the TNT Summer Team this year, raising additional funds for research. As for his next marathon, Ahern has Honolulu, Hawaii at the top of his list.

As a golf course superintendent, Aherns days are filled with running projects at San Jose Country Club. As a marathoner, evenings are spent projecting how fast he can run. You just might say, Ahern has his life running A-O.K! 