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A Runner For Life:

PRACTICING CHI HELPS MILLER SEE GLASS AS HALF FULL

By: SHARON ROBB

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Alan Miller has always seen the glass as half full.

The eternal optimist is one of South Florida's "old-timers" in the running community.

At 58, the Cooper City runner is one of the original members of a Saturday morning training group that has been meeting before sunrise for long runs since 1983 and Wednesday nights on the Hollywood Broadwalk since 1987.

An avid runner since 1978, Miller has competed in 63 marathons, including 24 New York City Marathons.

It was at the 2004 New York City Marathon where he met Danny Dreyer, founder and author of ChiRunning, the combination of running with the principles of Tai Chi and laws of physics. The focus is on muscles, joints, ligaments, body and soul.

Miller was intrigued by the sport's principles during their introduction and attended his workshop three months later in Miami Beach.

A follower of alternative holistic healing, meditation and yoga since the 1970s, Miller liked the idea of "moving with nature" when it came to running, especially when it promoted longevity. But the experienced runner wasn't convinced until he experienced firsthand what it did for his running and well-being.

"Chi is a natural energy that we all have," Miller said. "We just need to learn to direct it in a more focused way. The concept has always been there but meeting him and reading his book drove it home to me. I am focusing more on my core strength, my posture and relaxing my breathing and muscles. I began to feel less effort and that's the key."

Miller became a certified ChiRunning instructor, the only one in South Florida, and now teaches workshops at various locations. His first was at the Cooper City Recreation Center where he was greeted with mixed reaction. "There were a few 'aha' moments for some of them but no one walked away with any negativity," he said. Now he is gaining a healthy following.

A1A Marathon women's winner Fiona Bilodeau of Fort Lauderdale said she used the technique to stay relaxed while training for the marathon. She ran a career-best 3:13:05.

His next workshop is April 21 at the Center for Healing Arts at Imperial Point Medical Center, 10:30 a.m.-3:30 p.m.

"It wasn't coincidence that I stopped having periformis muscle problems after six years and ran seven minutes faster [in 3:03] than I thought I would do at New York [in 2004]," Miller said. "For it to be the magic pill to help runners and walkers they have to practice it in their workout and become disciplined. There are old habits to break and obstacles to overcome but it can be done."

Miller, an adjunct psychology and stress management professor at Barry University who works part-time for Child Net, a child protection agency program for neglected and abused children, knows all about overcoming obstacles.

His older brother John, 60, a former prominent Manhattan attorney, sustained a brain injury and lives with the assistance of a home healthcare service. Every year he runs the New York City Marathon, Miller is inspired when he sees him in the crowd at First Avenue and 79th Street, where his law office was. "I give him a high five as I run by ... he always picks up my spirits," Miller said.

There also is his longtime friend and training partner, Hector Rodriguez, who suffered a heart attack March 29, 2005, that left him with a brain injury. He is in a South Miami healthcare facility.

Miller was diagnosed with prostate cancer in May 2001 and underwent radiation treatments at the Dattoli Cancer Center in Sarasota, which encouraged him to run through the treatment. He called it his "wakeup call." He said after that he never lost sight of what's important in life.

IF YOU GO

When: April 21, 10:30 a.m.-3:30 p.m.

Where: Imperial Point Medical Center, Center for Healing Arts, 6401 N. Federal Highway.

Of note: The ChiRunning workshop is for all ages and levels of runners and walkers.

Web site: www.ChiRunning.com

Fee: \$125. Call 954-776-8748 to register. Pre-registration is required. Enrollment is limited. Bring a friend and receive 10 percent off for two. To contact Miller e-mail chitraining@bellsouth.net.

The benefits: Less pounding, injuries and pain. Less muscle soreness. Increase speed without increasing effort. Enhance joy of running. Increase your mental clarity and focus.

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