

FLORIDA FIRE FIGHTER CALLED TO DUTY ON MARATHON ROUTE

When Pat Conrey decided to run the Flying Pig Marathon, he did so with a purpose. He just didn't know the higher purpose it would serve.

Conrey, a 40-year-old EMT/firefighter and marathoner from Clearwater, Florida, made the commitment to participate in the 2008 Flying Pig Marathon in honor of fallen Cincinnati fire fighter Oscar Armstrong III, who died in a house fire in March, 2003. "They teach a class on Oscar's death and how this can be prevented in the future," said Conrey. "Once I heard his story, leaving two youngsters behind and a third on the way, I knew I had to do something."

What he decided to do, is run the Marathon in full fire fighting gear, including helmet, jacket, air pack and shoes, about 40 extra pounds. Money raised through his run would help Armstrong's family. Tragically, before the Marathon, his run would become a memorial for two more fire fighters, as Colerain Fire Captain Robin Broxterman and Fireman Brian Schira died in a Cincinnati-area fire a month before the event.

By the time Marathon morning rolled around, Conrey had enlisted dozens of Cincinnati fire fighters to run with him—a group at a time, who would run a few miles, then peel off to let a fresh group of fire fighters take over. And that decision, that show of support for Conrey in his effort, may have saved one runner's life.

Because it was during mile 10, through the Cincinnati suburb of Hyde Park, that Bobby Edwards, a 10-year Flying Pig Marathon 'Streaker,' suddenly collapsed of a heart attack. Conrey and his pack of fire fighters came up to the scene, less than a minute after Edwards fell.

"When we got there, I said 'It's time to go to work, boys,'" said Conrey. "I didn't do much more than just hand them drugs. The paramedics with me, they saved his life."

Ironically, just before the incident, Conrey and his group had stopped to chat with other fire fighters along the course. Conrey thinks while they were stopped, Edwards ran past them. If Edwards would have collapsed behind them, they would never have known about the medical emergency and never would have been in position to help. In other words, because three Cincinnati-area fire fighters died, Edwards survived.

By the time Conrey and his support runners finished the Marathon in 5:30, the fire fighters' story of heroism had made it all the way to the finish line, where members of Armstrong's family were waiting for him. "We always say we'll never forget and we better mean it," Conrey said after the race. "We say fire fighters are a family. Well, I told Oscar's mom, you're part of the family."

"To have others run with him, that had to be special," said Annette Armstrong, Oscar Armstrong's mother. "As a mother I was concerned about him trying to do this, but for him as a marathon runner, he had no doubt he would finish."

Conrey's community efforts in his home area of Clearwater earned him the honor of Clearwater Fire Fighter of the Year in 2007. His charity efforts at the Cincinnati Flying Pig Marathon could earn him a similar title in 2008.