

Delmont man to swim English Channel

by Linda Lyman

Darren Miller kept his thermostat set at 58 degrees all winter. Every morning, he got up in his frosty house in Delmont and took a cold shower. Miller was not trying to save money or conserve energy. Rather, he was working to acclimatize his body to cold in preparation to swim the English Channel this summer.

Growing up in Murrysville, Miller swam for Franklin Regional and then for two years while at Penn State working on a degree in broadcast journalism. After an injury sidelined him from swimming, he got into heavy weight lifting. In 2008, wanting to improve his cardiovascular shape, he started running and decided to run a marathon. He found he “really had a knack” for distance running, so kept training and ran in three long distance races in that first year. He has now qualified for the Boston Marathon in April.

But Miller likes to “keep pushing the envelope,” so he got into Ultra-marathons - races of 50 miles or more. He completed one with a broken bone in his foot. While training for a 100 mile run, he re-injured his foot.

Then, while bikeriding with his friend, Cathy Lee Cartieri-Mehl, he “sold her on the idea” of sponsoring him for an English Channel swim. Cartieri-Mehl had recently lost her father to cardiac disease, so when Miller said he would do the swim to raise money for the charity of her choice, she elected to raise funds to help families with the cost of infant cardio-thoracic surgery at Children’s Hospital. Thus, the Forever Fund was started.

Miller is inspired to push himself to the levels that he does by David Goggins. The Navy Seal enters the world’s toughest endurance races to raise money for the children of fallen soldiers. Goggins says on his Web site that he felt if he “experienced some physical pain it would inspire people to get interested and donate money” to his cause.

Miller, a Private Client Group Relationship Manager with PNC Bank, said being blessed with the ability to push himself, to take on these huge challenges, allows him to raise money for children who are sick, whose families may not have the funds or insurance to pay the costs for their care.

While he does not have a set financial goal for his Channel swim, he hopes that someday someone will tell him that the funds he raised help save a life. He also hopes to inspire others to “get up and move,” to eat healthy, and to do something for their community. “There is always room to grow, to make a difference in the world,” he said.

While a competitive swimmer, Miller swam only sprints so his conditioning for the Channel swim is much different from his prior training. He is working on his endurance, working to get his body ready for the cold water in the Channel (usually 50-60 degrees) and trying to gain weight while running, biking and swimming for hours. He said, “The hardest part of my training is stepping into that cold shower. I’d rather do a 100 mile run than get in that cold shower, but I need it for conditioning.”

While his Channel swim is tentatively scheduled for July 18, he said he could be told to go anytime from the day after his July 9 arrival until his planned return home on July 23. He must be in place and ready to go at any hour his escort pilot deems the



Darren Miller practices for his English Channel swim by diving into the cold river waters in Pittsburgh.

weather appropriate. He must do the swim in a Speedo-type suit as the rules prohibit the use of wet suits or baggy board type shorts.

While the swim is listed at twenty-one miles, no one can swim straight from Dover, England to Cap Gris Nez France because of the current. So, he will swim through the world’s busiest shipping channel in an “s” pattern, staying to the left of the pilot boat that will accompany him. An observer for one of the two organizations that verify swims will ride along on the boat. Miller can have a support person along to provide him with nutrition and drink, but that refreshment must be given to him without any physical contact.

Conditions can vary from calm water to Force 6 winds and waves of over two meters. Others have completed the swim in anywhere from 7 to 27 hours. Miller may meet up with jellyfish, seaweed and an occasional piece of flotsam along the way. But at least the water is too cold for sharks!

By December 2005, only 811 swimmers had made a verified crossing since Matthew Webb first swam the Channel in 1875. Miller hopes to add his name to the list of those who have successfully accomplished this Herculean task.

He admits that his mother is scared to death while his father thinks he is crazy. But he is focused on the words of Goggins, who said, “I am nobody special, but I refuse to say the words, ‘I can’t.’”

Information on Millers Channel swim and on how to donate to the Forever Fund of the Children’s Hospital Foundation can be found on the web site www.teamforever.us.

Along with Cartieri-Mehl, and her family, Miller is being sponsored by Biossential Nutrition, Anabolic Laboratories and East Suburban Sports Medicine Center.