

Baker to Vegas run honors fallen officers

Written by By Rick Abasta For the Sun
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Marathon runner to represent Navajo Police Team

Nelson McCabe, 56, of Coyote Canyon, N.M. is training for the 2018 Baker to Vegas Challenge Cup Relay. Now in its 34th year, two Los Angeles Police Officers first started the annual run, which honors the fallen in law enforcement. The upcoming race is scheduled for March 17-18, and features 120 miles of pavement spread over 20 stages with a field of 8,000 runners.

The run begins in Baker, California and ends at Las Vegas, Nevada. The course runs through Death Valley and is considered one of the most grueling challenges around.

“Baker to Vegas pertains to all of the fallen officers from around the country and the Navajo Nation,” McCabe said of the race’s mission. “It’s to honor our fallen officers.”

McCabe has participated in the run with Navajo Nation law enforcement officers for the past three years, and noted that his team placed first in their division last year.

His involvement began in 2016, when a phone call at work caught him off guard.

“I was at work and they said a criminal investigator is calling for you,” McCabe said. “I picked up the phone and he said he was a criminal investigator with the Navajo Police in Shiprock. I got

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scared and wondered what happened.”

It turned out the police officer was recruiting McCabe to join the Navajo Police Team for the Baker to Vegas Challenge.

“I joined the team and Vice President Jonathan Nez’s office sent over a waiver,” he said. “It’s an honor to run, I really have great respect for [police officers].”

On July 17, 2017, the participants of the Baker to Vegas Challenge for the Navajo Police Team were honored, including Nez.

The vice president also joined the Navajo Police for the 2017 run and helped the team place first in their division.

“We honor our fallen police officers during this event,” Nez said. “They have reached the end of watch and we will never forget their sacrifice.”

The Baker to Vegas run is one of many events that McCabe participates in throughout the year. By far, his favorites are the Just Move It events because he gets outdoors and participates with family and friends.

“In the summer, we like to go out there and do a lot of Just Move It runs,” McCabe said. “We really enjoy it. I teach my grandkids to exercise with me.”

Staying physically active has been beneficial for McCabe, who said his classmates from high school often remark about his youthful appearance.

For the past 40 years, McCabe has worked at Coyote Canyon Rehabilitation Center as a job

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coach. He mentors clients who work at the post office in Window Rock and Fort Defiance.

“We’re teaching them to become independent,” he said of his clients.

They often join him for running events like Just Move It. McCabe is a role model for his clients, who he says often mimic his mannerisms and activities.

“It seems like they enjoy whatever I do,” McCabe said. “One guy tells me he’s going to have perfect attendance like me at the Just Move It events. He went to JMI all last summer.”

Since beginning his running career at the age of 16 on the Hopi Reservation, McCabe has run 32 marathons, more than 50 half marathons and countless 10K and 5K events.

“I’m still running strong,” he said.

When he was 17, McCabe clocked his fastest mile at 4:49. His best pace was 5:48 per mile and these days, it fluctuates between seven minutes and 7:30.

“My PR for a marathon is two hours 46 minutes,” he said “For the half marathon it’s one hour 35 minutes.”

In 2000, his time of 2:46 at the Duke City Marathon in Albuquerque qualified him for the Boston Marathon. In Boston, his time was 2:48.

“It was a great experience for me,” he said of the Boston Marathon. “In high school, I always used to say that I was going to run the Boston Marathon. That dream came true.”

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McCabe has run the Los Angeles Marathon numerous times and sees running as the solution to diabetes and obesity.

“It doesn’t hurt to exercise or just walk,” McCabe said. “You don’t have to go out there and run hard, just get out and walk. You’ll feel good.”