

# Finding the Key to LIFELONG FITNESS

Ask Joe Vida for fitness advice, and you may be surprised at the answer. The Audrey Moore RECenter fitness director, health coach and personal trainer says the key to exercise is very simple.

“Find an activity you love to do, start out easy, be consistent and do it regularly – three to four days a week,” he said. “People in their 80s and 90s can build muscle strength, and knowing that should motivate anyone. It’s never too late.”

Vida has a lifelong track record for practicing what he preaches. He says he has loved running since he was a child – an interest that inspired his career path and ultimately led him to marathon running.

“I started with a 5K and then a 10K in 1991 while I was studying sports medicine and athletic training at Waynesburg University in Pennsylvania,” he said. “Then I decided to run in the Pittsburgh Marathon. After crossing the finish line, I was so fatigued, I said, ‘I’m never doing that again!’” A few days later, Vida thought it over and changed course. “I decided, ‘I have to improve on that.’”

Vida wanted to test his limits and see if he could go the 26.2-mile distance in the Boston Marathon. He knew he would have to improve his Pittsburgh Marathon time of 4:02:47 by more than 50 minutes to qualify. With consistent training, he reached that milestone seven years later.

“I ran in my first Boston Marathon in 1999 and finished it in 3:03:01,” he recalled proudly. It was almost an hour faster than the then 27-year-old’s very first marathon time.

These days Vida enjoys running along the scenic trails in Fairfax County parks. One of his favorite training spots is the nearly 5-mile loop at Burke Lake Park.

“Fresh air is invigorating – particularly in the pandemic,” he said. “Being outdoors surrounded by trees near a beautiful lake is a great break from the mental stress of mask-wearing and being socially distant indoors.”

This year, Vida was concerned that the COVID-19 pandemic would dash his dream of reaching his next fitness milestone – the Boston Marathon Quarter Century Club. This elite distinction requires running in the prestigious race for 25 years straight. The usual April event was canceled for pandemic-related safety reasons, but the 2020 virtual Boston Marathon in September enabled Vida to keep his streak alive. Ever determined, he charted his 26.2-mile course along the trails near his Reston home and joined about 18,000 participants worldwide in running their individual race.

“My wife, Julie, has always supported my running goals,” Vida said. “For the virtual marathon, she met me at miles 9, 11, 18.5 and 21.5 providing key nutrients to get me to the finish line.” Julie also took pictures along the way and met him at the finish line with his commemorative jersey and flowers.

“Julie always has flowers for me when I see her at the finish line,” Vida said fondly. “It’s a tradition started by a dear aunt who passed away after my 13th Boston Marathon. Julie has kept the tradition ever since.”

If Vida can stay on track, he will reach his Boston Marathon Quarter Century Club goal in 2023. Until then, he’ll continue following his own advice with regular training while leading others to better fitness at Audrey Moore RECenter.

“I want to run as well as I can for as long as I can, and I hope this story inspires others to set goals and live a healthier, more enjoyable life,” he said. “The body was designed for movement and more people would benefit tremendously from being more active.”

Exercise comes in many forms, and the Park Authority offers options for everyone from babies to super seniors. Find something you love in the Aquatics, Dance, Exercise and Fitness, Golf, Outdoor Recreation or Sports sections, register and get moving!

