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Wiedmer: Callahan makes more than Team Chad proud

by Mark Wiedmer
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Joe Goodman still is not sure his 63-year-old eyes will believe what they're seeing this afternoon at the Chattanooga Waterfront Triathlon when his 34-year-old law partner David Callahan completes his 52nd triathlon in 52 weeks.

"I think he's nuts," Goodman said with a chuckle over the phone Friday night. "Working the hours he works, having his first child and competing in all these triathlons for Team Chad. It's crazy. But I'm also amazed and awed. He certainly has my respect. I couldn't be more proud of him."

Team Chad. Goodman's been there from the beginning for the Nashville-based charity. He was there when his stepson, Chad Welch, was diagnosed with acute myelogenous leukemia in 2005. He was there two years later when Chad lost his fight with the disease at the unthinkable young age of 30. He was there when family and friends, including Callahan, decided to form Team Chad to help all those folks about to face similar fights with far less resources than the Goodmans had.

And, of course, he was there 18 months ago when Callahan first concocted this crazy idea to complete 52 triathlons in 52 weeks to raise money and awareness for Team Chad at roughly the same time he was about to become a father to Lincoln and had just become a law partner with Patrick Witherington in the new Nashville firm Callahan Witherington.

"I couldn't have done this without the support of my wife and the firm," said Callahan, whose third triathlon in this quest was last year's Waterfront event. "In a normal week I was often leaving work around lunchtime on Thursday and not returning to the office until Tuesday. In the mobile, wireless world we live in now, I could still get a lot done, but there were a lot of office days missed."

Countered Goodman: "David's carried his weight. There's been many a Monday morning that I've come in to find a draft of this, that and the other in our drop box. He's kind of an obsessive-compulsive person, and he just drove himself daily to make this happen."

What's happened for Team Chad is at least 35,000 new dollars (and growing) for a charity that's already raised more than \$650,000 to help families who can't afford to get proper treatment when facing the fight Chad Welch once faced.

Or as Chad's widow, Haley, noted on the charity's website (www.teamchad.us): "We've seen people die because they didn't have insurance to pay the thousands and thousands of dollars it costs to do a stem cell transplant. It was heartbreaking, and it is not acceptable."

Said Callahan: "We have an apartment in Nashville for people to stay while a family member's getting treatment. We provide gas cards, things like that. When Chad was undergoing treatment at

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Vanderbilt, he became very concerned over how the disparity of wealth alters people's access to care. He would constantly ask the question: 'How do people who don't have money survive cancer?' We formed Team Chad to help change that."

Callahan's passion for his quest was so evident that before he'd ever covered the first mile of the 1,000 or more he intended to race, he had received \$18,000 in pledges. Now that he's competed in 20 states -- 17 of them with his wife, Maggie, and Lincoln along for the ride -- driven more than 14,000 miles and flown at least 12,000 (including twice to California), it's not unreasonable to expect that \$35,000 to soar.

But what will he remember most about the experience? What were the best and worst from those 52 triathlons in 52 weeks, not all of them quite as long as the Waterfront's 1.5-kilometer swim in the Tennessee River, 42-kilometer bike ride and 10k run, the transitions all taking place at Ross's Landing?

"I'd say Branson [Mo.] was the hardest," Callahan said. "It's in the Ozarks. Lots of up and down, up and down."

The most fun?

"I'd say the NASCAR track at Richmond [Va.] Motor Speedway," he recalled. "They built a pool in the infield for the swimming. Then you biked and ran on the racetrack. And because of the way it was set up, I got to complete five competitions in the same weekend."

The worst may have been the triathlon in Palm Springs, Calif., last December, when Callahan figured his family could escape the typical chill of the Music City during the holidays for balmy southern California.

"Remember the polar vortex we dealt with all winter?" he asked. "Well, it started out there. The water temperature was 56 degrees; the air was 34 degrees. Maggie and Lincoln stayed in the car the whole race. Brutal."

His view of the Scenic City should wind up in Chamber of Commerce brochures or on its website, however.

"I can't speak highly enough of Chattanooga," Callahan said. "Some cities just don't embrace all these spandex-clad adults taking over their community. Of all the cities I've raced in, Chattanooga is at the top for being a welcoming city."

Both Callahan and Goodman expect to have much to speak highly of by the close of today.

"I expect it will be an emotional day," Callahan said. "The culmination of 18 months of planning, hard work, anticipation. Racing's all Lincoln's ever known. He's going to get to be a normal baby now. He's not going to see Daddy in pain every weekend."

Added Goodman, who'll be at Ross's Landing today with his wife, Judy: "Team Chad is so much bigger than our son, so much bigger than a lot of our friends who helped start this. There are a lot of thirty-somethings like Chad bringing even bigger stewardship to this, really giving back."

It is not always the image of Generation Y. It seems at odds with their triple-caramel-macchiato, Tori Burch shoes, iPhone-iPad-i/me/my world.

But the last 52 weeks have at least momentarily softened the Baby Boomer Goodman's philanthropic view of the future.

"The next generation," he said, "is going to be OK."

Especially if Callahan is the norm rather than the exception.

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about Mark Wiedmer...

Mark Wiedmer started work at the Chattanooga News-Free Press on



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Valentine's Day of 1983. At the time, he had to get an advance from his boss to buy a Valentine gift for his wife. Mark was hired as a graphic artist but quickly moved to sports, where he oversaw prep football for a time, won the "Pick' em" box in 1985 and took over the UTC basketball beat the following year. By 1990, he was ...



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