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LAKE PLACID NEWS

ON THE SCENE: Run, Jenny, run ... all the way across America

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Jenny Hoffman poses with several members of her support team: Jill Yeomans of Keene Valley, Grace Fisher, Jenny, Cinder Wolff and Michelle Goldberg. (Provided photo)

Our region is filled with overachievers in sport; to win the Ironman Lake Placid triathlon gives an athlete creds like no other Ironman

outside Hawaii, as the course is that tough. Lake Placid is where the “*Miracle on Ice*” hockey game and speedskater Eric’s Heiden’s stunning record of winning and setting an Olympic or World record in all distances took place in 1980. Local athletes have won Olympic and World Cup gold, silver and bronze medals in a wide variety of sports.

On Nov. 2, Jenny Hoffman of Keene, mother of three, joined that pantheon of achievers by breaking the world record for a woman running across the United States by a week. Hoffman completed the 3,032-mile course in 47 days, 12 hours, and 35 minutes — seven days and four hours faster than the previous record holder. The highest pass was over 12,000 feet. Hoffman 8,000 calories daily and wore out a dozen pairs of shoes and while running 15 hours a day on six hours of sleep.

It was her third try.

“I like tackling big challenges,” said Hoffman. *“I’ve always wanted to tackle the biggest, highest, longest thing before me. From the moment I found out there were 46 mountains over 4,000 feet when I was 10, it was, ‘OK, I’ll do that.’ I hear about it, and I want to do it. I have that compulsion, plus it is fun to have a challenge. The bigger the challenge, the more satisfying it is to tackle it.”*

Hoffman credits the support of her husband Daniel Larson, who provided her daily updates on course corrections, enabling her to find her way through congested communities and other challenges in the safest way possible; her support team, who provided all manner of support; her kids, friends, students and colleagues; and her fellow members of the Keene Valley Congregational Church that sent her encouragement along her journey.



From left are Daniel Larson, daughter Amber and Jenny Hoffman (Provided photo)

“I was grateful having the support of my husband keeping the household together, and he also did all the routing,” said Hoffman. “He figured out which turns and sent me careful, efficient instructions so I could run the least miles on the safest possible roads.”

“I am grateful for the support team, a sisterhood of very gender-diverse people,” Hoffman continued. “There was Jill Yeomans, part of the local community here; Sydney Dolland, who is a grad student at MIT; Yan, a grad student at Harvard; Grace Fisher and Michelle Goldberg, other runners, and Cinder Wolff, who does massage and knows a lot about the human body. These six people were with me for the journey, two at a time. They helped me get the nutrition and body care I needed to make it, plus driving the support vehicles.”

Support Hoffman needed to scale the various high mountain passes, run through rain, heavy at times, winds that seemed bent on blowing her back to San Francisco, and clouds of harvest dust as she ran maskless through the Midwest. Through a head cold, tears, and other challenges, Hoffman stayed determined not to pull out of the run, as had happened in Ohio on her first attempt.

“Jenny’s run was a lot of work, especially in her first run in 2019 when our kids were younger,” said her husband, a Harvard Research Associate in particle physics. *“With this, her third run, we were in pretty familiar territory. I put together a turn-by-turn spreadsheet on where to go. In Nevada, there were only four turns in the entire state, but there’s a lot more navigation in cities like San Francisco or going through the entire state of New Jersey and into New York City. Each night, I tried to update the spreadsheet using Google Maps.”*

While Larson was home most of the time with the kids, he did join Jenny for four days in Pennsylvania. He said that their kids were pretty enthusiastic and supportive. Hard though it was, they could not spend much time talking with her as Jenny was so mentally and physically exhausted by the end of any given day and needed her rest.

“There was a lot of luck and a huge amount of tenacity involved in completing this third attempt,” said Larson.

“One lesson I learned is there is a lot of corn in this country,” said Hoffman. *“I ran through corn for 27 days and spent a lot of time thinking about how hard the middle of this country works to feed the rest of this country. I saw how intense the harvest is. As a professor, I may have to pull an all-nighter to meet grant deadlines, but that’s insignificant in the scheme of things. When we passed through Ohio, I saw the rain coming, and the farmers were out all night long, harvesting for thirty-six straight hours to get it all in before the rain. That’s a deadline; that’s serious.”*

“We can get caught up in little things, but to see how the work of the country is happening in the middle was powerful,” she added. *“One of the notable experiences was spending a night in a Utah cement*

factory. They work all night long, turning lime into cement. They were so friendly. They gave us access to their showers and invited us to have breakfast with them. They gave me a reflective shirt that was brighter than the one I had; I wore that shirt the rest of the way across the country, and I was safer because of it. A woman in Nebraska gave me 12 fresh eggs out of her backyard because she heard I was eating a lot of eggs (eight a day). There was a lot of generosity.

“What’s next? That’s the question I hope to figure out. I feel a lot of responsibility to give back somehow and pay it forward because this was a dream I held for many, many years. This run was my third try after two major failures. If I can somehow use this run to inspire or help other people overcome failures, I’d like to be able to do that.”

“I’m pretty proud of her,” said Jenny’s daughter, Ember. *“I think it’s cool, and I liked going to New York City for the finish.”*

(Naj Wikoff lives in Keene Valley. He has been covering events for the Lake Placid News for more than 15 years.)