



Jamie Parks celebrates running with his wife, Lynn, for 25,000 miles.

LOVE on the RUN

South Suburban Merged, IL Branch 4016 member **Jamie Parks** is celebrating 25 years—and 25,000 miles—of competitive running with his wife, Lynn. And for every one of those miles, he pushed Lynn in a wheelchair.

Dedication to their task, and to each other, has paid off for the Tinley Park, IL, couple. Just months before they were to be wed in 1987, Lynn suffered a traumatic brain injury in a car crash. She spent 17 days in a coma, and it was seven months more before she was able to talk again. With Jamie's help, Lynn went through years of rehabilitation. Their planned wedding day came and went.

"We stuck together throughout her rehab, and we ended up being married in '94 because she wanted to walk down the aisle, which she was able to do with some assistance," Parks said. But she never regained the ability to walk more than a short distance.

By then, Jamie already had begun pushing Lynn in runs and races. An avid competitive runner, Jamie was inspired by other wheelchair-pushing runners he saw, and it made it easier to be with his wife at the finish line if she was already in a race with him. They first ran a local 10K together in 1991 and never looked back, completing nearly 300 running events together so far.

Training with Lynn wasn't easy for Jamie at first, but he's no ordinary athlete—on

top of his daily mail route, he has run at least a mile every day for 25 years, even on a treadmill, after abdominal surgery, with the flu and while nursing a broken toe. Religiously devout and made of muscle and determination, Jamie keeps detailed records of every mile and every run. Last July, 25 years to the day after their first run together, Jamie and Lynn reached 25,000 miles—equal to a lap around the world.

It was the latest in a string of running achievements. In their first marathon together, the Chicago Marathon in 1996, the couple set an unofficial course record of two hours, 57 minutes for a wheelchair-and-runner duo—a feat that's even more impressive because they used a standard wheelchair that wasn't designed for speed.

In fact, they used a standard wheelchair until their fourth marathon, in Boston, in 2008. The year before, Jamie and Lynn had been honored as "Heroes of Running" by *Runner's World* magazine, and at the ceremony, the representative of a company that makes running wheelchairs approached the couple. "He came up to me after the awards ceremony and said he noticed that we were still running with this off-the-rack wheelchair," Parks said. The new chair was ready just in time to use in Boston.

To pile on to the achievements, Lynn gave birth to a daughter, Annalyn, who at 17 is a runner herself with a seven-year streak of hitting the pavement for at least a mile a day, like her dad.

The Parks' story has attracted coverage by dozens of publications and TV shows, including an hour-long documentary, "Marathon Love," which first aired on Discovery Health in 2008. The film included excerpts from home videos documenting their romance and Lynn's recovery, and chronicled their run that year in the Boston Marathon (they finished in three hours, 25 minutes and ahead of thousands of runners without wheelchairs).

When Jamie and Lynn began their running journey, a runner pushing someone in a wheelchair was uncommon, and some races even banned the practice. Now, many running events recognize this as a competitive category with official records. Jamie and Lynn plan to run in the Chicago Marathon this October to chase the official record.

Jamie never has thought of Lynn as slowing him down. "People say, 'Just imagine how much faster you'd be if you ran without pushing Lynn,'" he said. "You know what? I don't even want to know.

"We're a team. We're going to be a team racing together until God decides I'm not going to run anymore," he said. **PR**



Just one of their medals