

Going the extra 26.2 miles: Sherando graduates use marathon to help Hokies heal (June 4, 2007: Winchester Star)

By Teresa Dunham

Winchester - For Julia Kott, running the 26.2-mile Marine Corps Marathon is much more than a personal challenge. It's a way for the 20-year-old to regain control after the violent campus shootings at Virginia Tech on April 16.

"We decided we were going to run for the 32 victims," said Kott, a 2005 graduate of Sherando High School and pre-dental student at Tech.

She is organizing the Hokie Spirit Memorial Run, along with 2006 Sherando graduate and fellow Hokie Logan Thompson.

"Everyone is coming together for the same purpose," said Thompson, 19. "This is to allow a community of Hokies to heal."

Their idea: to unite 100 of their peers, faculty, and Tech alumni who will run in the Oct. 28 marathon in Washington. Each runner will raise \$1,000 to create a \$100,000 endowed scholarship in honor of those who died.

All 100 runners volunteered within 48 hours.

"Everything was by word of mouth," said Kott.

The fourth-largest marathon in the country, the Marine Corps Marathon speeds through the nation's capital.

It's been known to draw social leaders such as Oprah Winfrey, Sean "P-Diddy" Combs, and Al Gore.

"It's definitely something that takes a lot of struggle and strength to do," Kott said.

Inspired by her father who ran in past years and her grandfathers who served in the Marines, Kott planned to participate in the marathon long before the campus massacre on April 16.

Since that time, her resolve has grown stronger.

"We all were feeling like we were helpless," she said. "We wanted to gain control from this experience that was uncontrollable."

When she contacted Marine Corps Marathon organizers about her idea, they were more than willing to offer 100 slots for the Tech runners.

"Running is an individual sport, but this will be a team effort," said Thompson. "I was there [on April 16], and this event means a lot."

Thompson prefers not to talk about the violence, and Kott still hasn't completely grasped it.

"It didn't feel like it was my school," she said. "It hit me when I found out a few of my friends had gotten shot and passed."

Though she will never forget the tragedy, the Hokie cheerleader is looking forward to the fall semester.

"I have no doubt that the stands are going to be 100 percent full," Kott said. "It is Hokies all the way. We are spirited. I will forever be a Hokie."

Until then, she's keeping her spirits high by thinking about the marathon.

"Sometimes it's extremely stressful, but I feel like I'm healing [by organizing the marathon]," she said. "It's cool to see people so enthusiastic and so ready to do it."

Some students have already formed training groups within their communities for the summer break, she said.

For Thompson, the student response has been overwhelming. "It's surpassed all of my expectations," he said.

For more information about the Oct. 28 run, visit www.hokiesmemorialrun.com.

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