

Jonathan Roche Inside a Triathlete's Heart

by Shawn Smith

Photos by Mikene Daynes

What's inside a triathlete's heart? Look into the core of Erie resident Jonathan Roche, the fitness expert, eight-time Ironman finisher and ten-time Boston Marathon runner who has raised thousands of dollars for a half dozen different charities, and you'll see something on fire – a burning desire to make a healthy difference for people everywhere.

Roche knows the importance of helping others. His fundraising efforts started nine years ago when he ran the Boston Marathon to raise money for the Dana Farber Cancer Institute. In 1997, with Dana-Farber's Patient-Partner program, he met 13-year-old Drew. The first year, Drew's leukemia kept him from running the customary last mile of the Boston Marathon with his mentor. The next year, however, Drew was able to walk the last mile. Each year since, he and Jonathan walk and run part of the final leg of the race together. Drew, now 22, is leukemia free.

"He's like a brother to me," Roche says, "We just had our ninth year together." For many runners, a fast finishing time is the most important thing on their mind at the end of a marathon, but Roche's marathon personal best of 3:12:13 in 2003 included his ritual of finishing the final mile with his leukemia partner. Jonathan raises more than \$4,000 a year for the race.

The Boston Marathon isn't the only race Roche has completed to raise money for a charity. He has also raised thousands of dollars over the last five years by competing in the Boston to New York AIDS Ride. In addition, he has raced Ironman Florida for the last six years, picking a new charity as a fundraiser each year. Jonathan says he doesn't even know how much money he has raised in total, just that it's important that he keeps doing it.

His passion is personal. "When I was 12 years old, my mother died of lung cancer. It was so tough for her but she was steadfast and determined." His mother never even let on that she had been diagnosed with cancer. "She could have gone off the deep end with this alone, but she didn't," he says. "She never let it affect the children." This left a strong impression on Jonathan. "By the time I was 12 years old, I had learned everything I needed to know about life, thanks to my mother."

Roche, who is now 33, works as a personal trainer at the Flatiron Athletic Club in Boulder. He loves to compete in Ironman Triathlons and was selected to be All-American by USA Triathlon in 2003. Ironman USA in Lake Placid, New York is his favorite triathlon and he boasts an Ironman personal best of nine hours, fifty minutes and three seconds. But right now, Jonathan says he is juggling his job and triathlon training with the added pressure of starting a new business. "My dream scenario is to turn pro in the triathlon, but right now my business has taken a lot of attention."

Roche founded his company, Breakthrough Health & Fitness, based in Broomfield, in 2004. He says it is the first company to couple heart rate-based interval training programs with cutting edge research to maximize people's fitness results. His company developed the Momentum Weight Loss System, a program based on the science of heart rate training, which Jonathan uses in his own training and for his clients.

"There is a lot of misinformation about health and fitness," Roche says, "I hope to bring simple and effective tools to people." The product includes a nutrition guide, a workout DVD, customized web-based software and continual online support to help people achieve long-term, sustainable, weight loss results. He wants to offer people a coach-in-a-box system so that everyone, no matter where they live or what their fitness level, has access to a professional personal trainer who can guide them through an affordable weight-loss and fitness solution. Roche is beginning to market his company and products through QVC and an infomercial.

It's important to Jonathan that his company is also dedicated to helping others. Five percent of the company's profits will be donated to the Dana Farber Cancer Institute.

The Boston native has accomplished more in the last decade than most of us will in a lifetime. It's enough to make anyone exhausted. This triathlete, runner, personal trainer, fitness video instructor and entrepreneur is soon going to add the title of husband to the list. Roche says he's getting married on May 28.

"I know how important it is to have a healthy family," says Jonathan, "If I can help one person find their way to better health, then I've done my job."



Roche frequently runs on the trails in Boulder.

Jonathan says he doesn't even know how much money he has raised during charity races, just that it's important that he keeps doing it.

Roche trains a client at the Flatiron Athletic Club.

