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HAVE A CRACK

Reformed runner makes challenge

By BRONWYN BEYERS

THE O'Keefe Rail Trail marathon is fast approaching and Toolleen's Jane Anderson has challenged Heathcote residents to get involved regardless of running ability.

Ms Anderson was the first official entrant in the marathon, which will also be the first in a long list of goals she has set herself for the year after re-evaluating her life when her son left home to attend university in 2015.

"This gave me more time in my busy schedule and I made a commitment to get fit and get in shape," she said.

"It had been a long time since I'd looked after myself and had let too many things slide. It was now time to put priority back into my life.

"It had been decades since I had run, which was an activity I had never enjoyed.

"I started running because I could fit it around my work life and I had a pair of sneakers and a paddock I could run around.

"It was slow and hard and not particularly nice to start — but I started.

"An important concept in my life was the adage 'If you don't start this until next year, you'll just be a year older' and I wanted to make significant improvements.

"I fundamentally changed the way I eat and that was the most important aspect. If you haven't eaten properly, it makes it a lot more difficult to run and you can't out-run a bad diet.

"The running got me fit. The diet lost me the weight. I couldn't do one without the other. Ever tried running after consuming a vanilla slice? It's awful and punishing.

"Each day I ran it reinforced what I had to eat and, since then, I have lost more than 30kg."

Within a few weeks, Jane had managed to get up to 5km and last year entered her first fun run in about 30 years — a Mother's Day run — setting a big goal of 8km.

"My wonderful partner stood in the freezing cold rain and watched me

complete that. He's been a significant part of my success," Jane said.

"He often follows me running at night with his headlights on to make it safe for me, checks where I am when I'm running, picks me up if I have issues, replenishes my water supply and even, at my request, drops me off a long way from home so that I have to do a very big run."

Jane came close to last in the event, though she felt unfazed by the result, since finishing the run was a major personal triumph that she shared with the other runners.

"Runners are great people. They know the struggle. Each of us has their own in that regard and I've received tremendous support and a bunch of new friends just through running," Jane said.

"I love going into places like Athletes Foot in Bendigo and Echuca to get new shoes, being treated with utter respect and support from the staff there. They don't care what size and shape I am. They just want me in fantastic running shoes."

Jane employed a running coach in July 2015, who suggested running less and breaking up her training to include hilly walks, cycling and swimming, which made a big difference and by November Jane was back doing triathlons, which she had not competed in since her university days.

"I even joined a triathlon club (up in Echuca) which runs weekly events and they are a fabulous group of people, too. Yes, I'm really slow there too, but they are just lovely to me," Jane said.

"When you run you are instantly adopted by a whole group of people, no matter what your shape or fitness level is. I've had to put the tris on hold to focus back on my running.

"I've completed a few half marathons now (they don't even scare me anymore), and the O'Keefe is going to be my first full.

"I've now run every step of the O'Keefe, and while the event scares me (can I finish, will I finish, will I look stupid, etc etc), I am terribly excited."

The O'Keefe Rail Trail Marathon has been attracting considerable inter-



□ Jane Anderson will tackle the O'Keefe Rail Trail Marathon in May and is proving a force to be reckoned with. Photo: Mclvor Times

est from Australian and international runners in the lead up to the Rio Olympic Games later this year, as well as from amateur and novice runners keen on testing their mettle on the new marathon's course.

In addition to the full, half and quarter marathons, organisers have also added 500m races for children under five years and children five to seven years in response to the success of the 500m race at the Heathcote Community Games Fun Run.

Organisers have also announced a mascot race will be held at the event,

with a larger number of mascots signing on for the challenge, again hot on the heels of the successful mascot race at the Games.

"Running has not just resulted in fitness for me, it's given me balance in my life," Jane said.

"I use the time to help problem solve and almost meditate at times. I am thrilled that I started just over a year ago. Yes I'm a year older and look at me now. Who would have thought."

As well as the O'Keefe Rail Trail Marathon on May 1, Jane also intends

to take part in the Gold Coast Marathon in July, the Shepparton Marathon in August, a half marathon on the Italian Riviera in October and a half ironman in November.

"It's going to be a busy year, it's going to be a fantastic year — O'Keefe, here I come," Jane said.

For those who haven't run in a pair of sneakers since they were children or who want to get in shape to take on the marathon, free training sessions are held at Barrack Reserve on Thursdays from 5.30pm with coach Craig Green from Athletics Bendigo.