



Triumphing over adversity

Josh Wheeler beats cancer to win area triathlons

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Event

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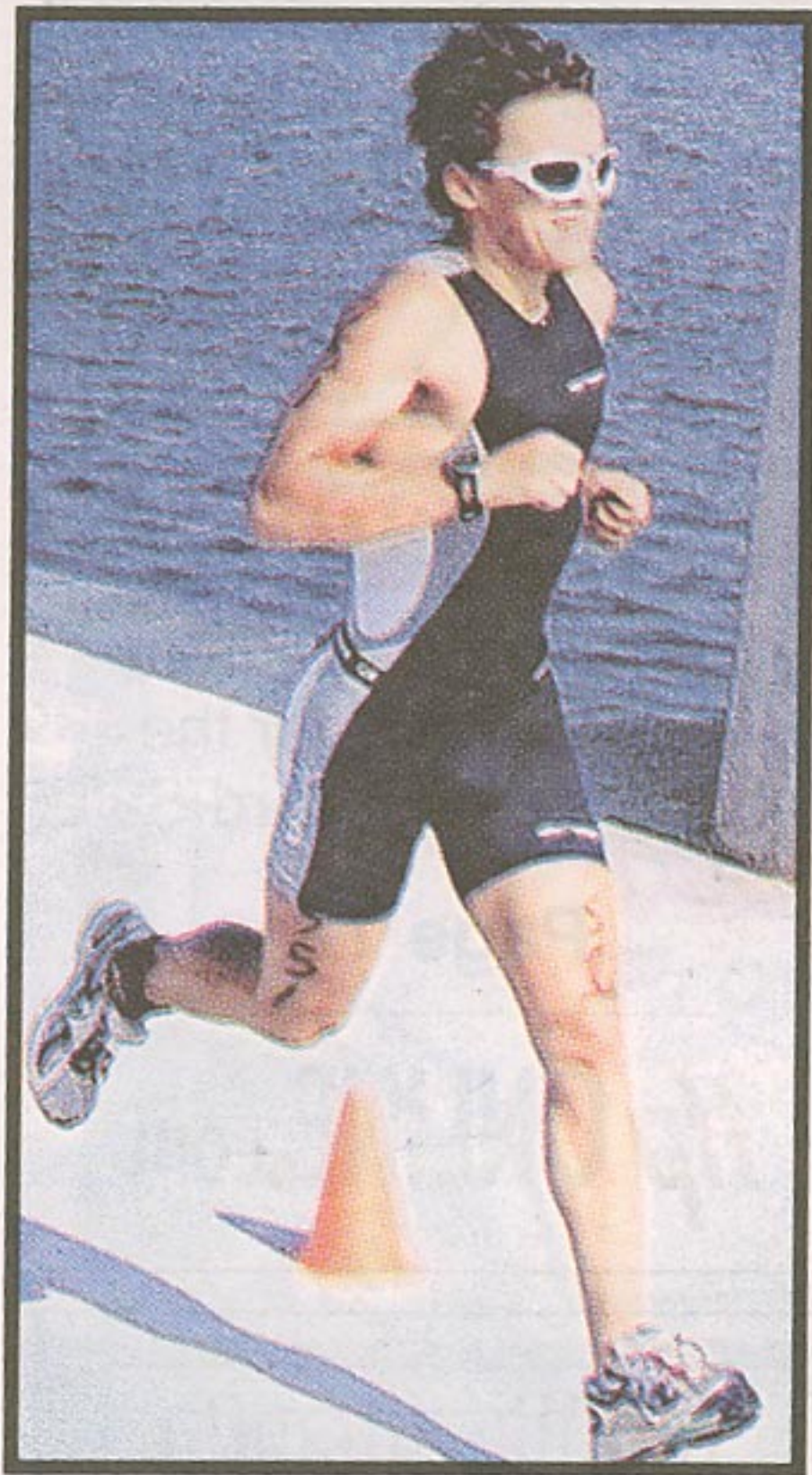
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Community NEWS



About the cover

Josh Wheeler runs in the Chattanooga Waterfront Triathlon, placing 2nd in his age group and 34th overall in a group of more than 1,000 athletes. A story is on page 10.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Looking Back

Signal Mountain through the years

■ **This week in 1973,** residents of Signal Mountain organized to raise the remaining \$672,400 for a \$1.7 million Town Center under construction on 22 acres at the junction of Rolling Way and Taft Highway.

More than \$1 million had been raised already through municipal taxes and a grant by the Bureau of Outdoor Recreation, and the remaining funds were to come from interested families, foundations, corporations and the business community.

The Town Center was to include city government buildings and recreational facilities for family activities, and be separate but visually related to the civic and recreational areas.

The biggest part of the project was to be the family center, with a swimming pool, ball diamonds and playgrounds. Six tennis courts were to be built and a paved bicycle trail was planned to loop all of the recreational areas without crossing any street.

The town hall and fire and police departments were to have easy access to thoroughfares, with a separate driveway on Rolling Way. An amphitheater occupying a portion of a rocky hillside between the tennis courts and James Boulevard was planned for the future.

Chairman of the committee to raise the balance of funds was Frederick O. Newman. Assisting him was A. Calvin Baird, James E. Ballard, J.C. Caldwell Jr., Thomas A. Caldwell Jr., William B. Close and J.F. Decosimo. Others assisting in fund-raising included Charles M. Denard, William D. Hawfield, A. Vincent Keyes, William A. Lyman, Felix Miller Jr., Everett Roberts and Alfred Smith.

Signal LEISURE

Josh Wheeler conquers cancer, triathlons

BY KATY MENA
COMMUNITY NEWS WRITER

Braces were not on Josh Wheeler's agenda as he began his senior year of high school at McCallie. Sure, his jaw was kind of crooked, but he had college to look forward to in a year, and braces just did not fit into his vision of a freshman first day. Consulting a growth specialist to see if his face would eventually correct itself, Mr. Wheeler managed to sidestep braces as he climbed into the MRI machine. What the radiologist found on the screen was a bit more frightening than dental work.

Mr. Wheeler was quite shocked last Sept. 28, when he received the news that he had a brain tumor. Never having experienced pain, dizziness, or fatigue, he felt like a healthy 18-year-old boy. "The whole experience was so surreal," he said. "I never had any symptoms. I never felt like I had cancer."

The harsh truth was that he did. Two brain surgeries to remove the tumor followed Mr. Wheeler's diagnosis. "I never tried to get too attached to it," said Mr. Wheeler of the tumor in his skull.

Though he was glad to kiss the malignancy good-bye, Mr. Wheeler was left with the reality that he could no longer participate in contact sports. A dedicated wrestler throughout high school, he would have to shift activities to get his athletic fix.

Having dropped 20 pounds as a result of his surgeries, Mr. Wheeler's body was smaller, but his physical strength remained. Strong in spirit as well as in body, he took his weight loss as an opportunity to rebuild his body for something new. "I thought, 'Why not start training to become a triathlete?'" he said.

Start training, Mr. Wheeler did. Possessing a background as an endurance athlete, Mr. Wheeler did not find the transition difficult as he began training in running and cycling. Swimming, however, posed a bit of a problem. "Swimming has always been my Achilles heel," he said, explaining that his small size would always make him sink to the bottom of the water. Never one to surrender to a challenge, Mr. Wheeler started practicing with McCallie swimming and diving coach Stan Corcoran.

Mr. Wheeler appears to have mastered all triathlon areas, as he has won several area



Signal Mountain resident Josh Wheeler pedals his way to victory in a recent triathlon.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

triathlons in the recent months. Placing first and second in his age group in races such as the Over the Mountain Triathlon and the Chattanooga Waterfront Triathlon, he has grown to love his new sport of choice.

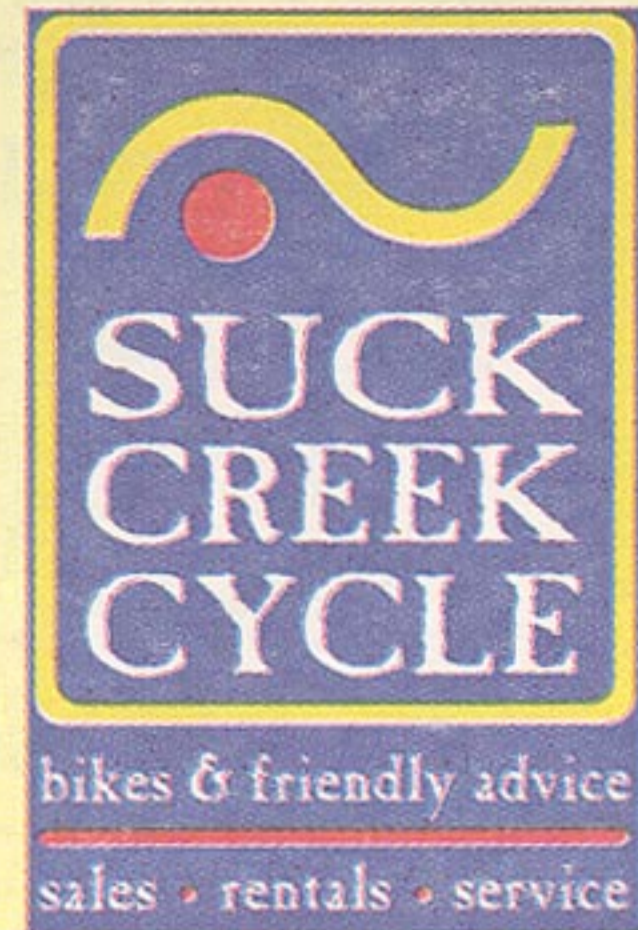
"I really started to enjoy winning," he said of his experience with the triathlons. "I really started to enjoy the thrill of competition."

While the cancer was what sparked Mr. Wheeler's newfound triathlon love, it has been set aside as he prepares for the future (though he keeps the date of his diagnosis on the handlebars of his bike as a reminder to stay strong, a practice learned from mentor Lance Armstrong). Headed for Appalachian State in the fall and the 2007 Triathlon Nationals next July, Mr. Wheeler has more important things to focus on than cancer.

And thankfully, braces are no longer part of the equation.

E-mail Katy Mena at kmena@tfccommunitynews.com

Pedal Pointers



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