

Marathon is perfect timing for Valencia resident

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Jeff Sved,
Valencia resident



By John Enrietto
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Running the Pittsburgh Marathon on Sunday hasn't been a dream for Jeff Sved.

It's more of a convenience. That is because he already had planned to travel here from Bolivia.

Sved, 27, a Valencia resident and Shady Side Academy graduate, has been in Bolivia for three years doing

volunteer work in six prisons through the Franciscan Mission Service.

He was not a runner until five years ago.

"I was pretty unathletic in high school," Sved said. "Running is more of a new-found hobby."

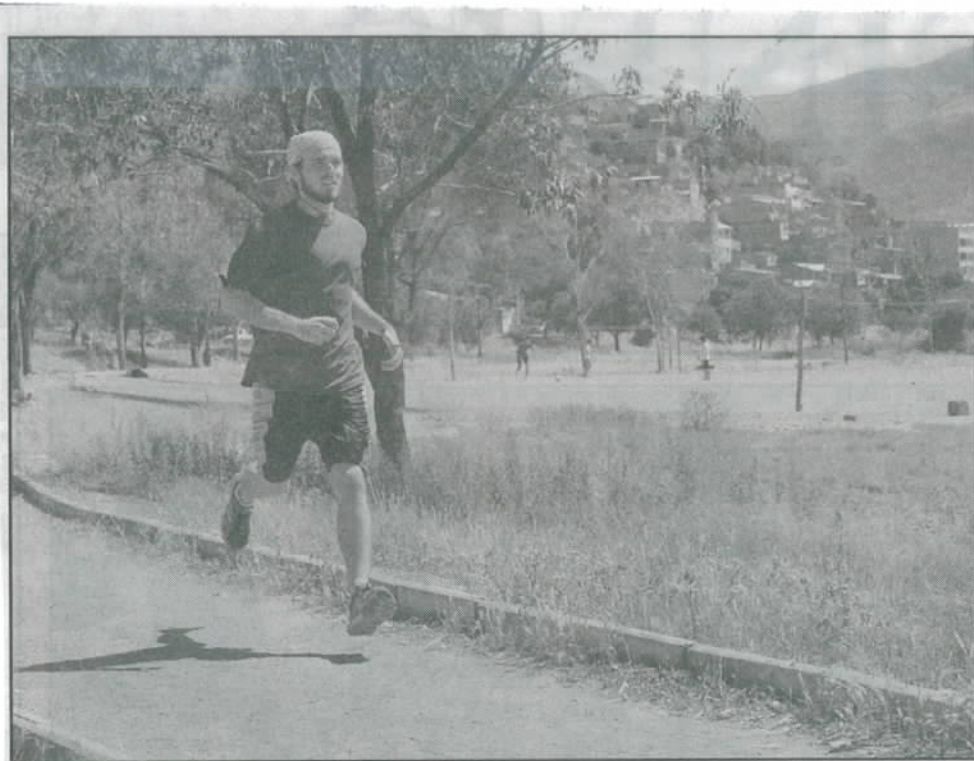
He developed that hobby as a means to deal with the stress of working in prison ministry. Sved spends time

working with or visiting prisoners daily.

During his prison ministry debut, which was at the Baylor Women's Correctional Institution in Wilmington, Del., in 2011, a roommate invited him on a run as a way to relieve tension.

"Being inside a prison is something that feels constricted and limiting or

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Jeff Sved is a Valencia resident but has been living in Bolivia for the past three years doing volunteer work through the Franciscan Mis-

sion Service. During his time there he has started running to release tension, and he will run the Pittsburgh Marathon on Sunday.

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Marathon

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even soul-smothering, so I needed to balance it out with things that are soul expanding," Sved said in a statement. "I run because I need that space to minister to myself so I am able to minister to others."

Sved ran a half-marathon in Cochabamba, Bolivia, in 2014. He ran a time of an hour, 48 minutes in borrowed shoes. His own shoes were too beaten up.

His sister, Alyson, is graduating from James Madison University this weekend. Sved had planned on coming home to visit for a few weeks along with attending her graduation.

"I looked up what marathons were being run during that time," Sved said. "It seemed a bit too perfect to pass up that the Pittsburgh Marathon was the first weekend I'd be in the U.S."

"I've been running steady for a couple of years now ... I had been running enough that I figured I might as well train for something as well."

Sved receives a monthly living stipend through the mission. One of his largest purchases in Bolivia was a new pair of running shoes.

"He wears shoes out over there all the time," Alyson Sved said. "Whenever someone in the family or people we know are going over to Bolivia to see him, we send over a new pair of running shoes from the states."

The prisons in which Sved does his volunteer work are high up in the Andes Mountains. He has been training at an elevation of 9,000 feet, which is

more than six times the elevation of Pittsburgh.

He also deals with intense hot sun and the threat of wild dogs as he trains.

"I'm more excited than concerned about the altitude," Sved said. "My muscles are used to functioning with less oxygen. Theoretically, it will be easier for me to maintain my pace in Pittsburgh."

Sved hopes to complete the Pittsburgh Marathon in three hours and 20 minutes.

As for the sun, Sved said, "The heat itself isn't bad. It is the strength of the direct sunlight that is difficult to avoid. But because of that, I try to run only in the early morning and around sunset."

"Even walking between prisons in the middle of the day, it's necessary to stay in the shade as much as possible. I couldn't imagine running during the day unless it was incredibly cloudy."

Sved has run as many as 55 miles a week while training for the marathon. That includes a 10-mile run every Wednesday evening. He follows a training program on Runners World magazine writer Hal Higdon's website.

He said the only time of the week he has trouble squeezing in his training run is Sunday mornings before Mass.

"Even starting the 20 milers at 5 a.m., it has been difficult to run, stretch, shower and eat while still arriving at the prison before the priest arrives," Sved said.

He shares his Bolivian training ground — a lake and bike path — with all

types of runners, including members of the Chilean Olympic team.

As for the wild dogs — have rocks, will travel.

"Wild dogs make running in some places impossible," Sved said. "In some places, you have to be careful just walking down the street."

"Even along the ciclovia (bike path), there are a few spots I know to walk with rock in hand to be ready. Once I tried running around the big oil refinery near our apartment, but it was more of a walk because I kept having to bend down to pick up rocks ... and was the only time I've been completely surrounded by a pack."

"Luckily, a tienda (store) owner saw and gave me a hand," Sved added.

Sved will be running the Pittsburgh Marathon with his cousin, Casey.

"This marathon has given Jeff a goal to work for," Alyson Sved said. "Casey gives him someone to run with at the event."

"He has always been service driven. Jeff did a lot of church and youth group work when he was in high school. He went to college at Villanova and started a program there for a soup kitchen."

"Our entire family is proud of him," she added.

Sved began prison mission work shortly after graduating from Villanova with a chemical engineering degree in 2011.

His mission term in Bolivia ends in December.

His next running goals are to run a sub-1:30 half-marathon in July and a three-hour marathon in December or January.