

## Nanton man sets sights on Prague marathon

### Team Diabetes raises money, awareness

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At first, Michael Kowalchuk didn't think it was a big deal when the doctor told him that he had Type 2 diabetes, but the more he read, the more he realized it was a big deal. Kowalchuk, who lives in Nanton and works at Lutes Tim-BR Mart in High River, learned Type 2 diabetes put him at risk for depression, anxiety, renal failure, bedsores, blindness and coronary artery disease.

What's worse, Kowalchuk learned Type 2 diabetes, also known as adult onset diabetes, is almost entirely preventable. "From what they tell me, it could have been avoided," he said, listing years of stress and improper eating habits as likely contributors.

Kowalchuk said that if he could go back and change old habits, he would. But, six months after his diagnosis, he certainly isn't dwelling on the past.

A couple of months after his diagnosis, Kowalchuk found a way he could make a difference.

Already an avid runner, Kowalchuk signed up to run a marathon in Prague in May 2009 for Team Diabetes, a national activity fundraising program for the Canadian Diabetes Association that provides men and women with the opportunity to raise money for diabetes research, education, advocacy and service.

In order to participate in the Prague race, Kowalchuk is required to raise \$6,100 for the Canadian Diabetes Association, and in exchange, the organization will pay for his race registration, accommodations and airfare, and provide fundraising materials and support.

The fundraising hasn't been easy, and Kowalchuk still has a long way to go, but he said all the time and effort is worth it if he can raise much-needed money and awareness for diabetes in the Foothills community.

"I would be doing it anyways," said Kowalchuk, whose dedication is apparent by the two large Team Diabetes banners hanging in his car windows. "This way, I get to see the world."

To prepare for the 42-kilometre race, Kowalchuk has been training four days a week, logging about 30 kilometres in and around Nanton.

His diabetes presents several obstacles to long-distance running — he must monitor his blood sugar levels regularly and pack plenty of extra food — but Kowalchuk remains 100 per cent committed to his goal.

And, when he's tempted to give up on physical training or door-to-door fundraising, Kowalchuk said he remembers an inspirational card he received from a close friend after completing his first marathon.

"It said 'Be the change you wish to see in the world,'" Kowalchuk said. "And, that's what I'm trying to do."

Wendy Ehman, southern Alberta development co-ordinator for the Canadian Diabetes Association, said individuals like Kowalchuk are crucial in the fight against the diabetes "epidemic."

"Michael is doing an amazing job of raising awareness in his community," she said, adding that his efforts are especially important in a rural area, where support for Team Diabetes can run thin.

"Diabetes, as a whole, is an epidemic, so awareness is very important," Ehman said.

Kowalchuk said Prague is just the first step of many on his journey to raise money and support for Team Diabetes.

"My goal is to participate in one marathon every year, for the rest of my life," he said. "This is just the beginning."