

He'll fight heat, sand to help kids breathe

Run in Sahara Desert raises funds for Johns Hopkins, other charities

BY PAT VAN DEN BEEMT

Jeff Arricale has watched two of his four children struggle to breathe because of a lung disease. He never will experience their daily battle, but he is going to find out what it's like to gasp for air.

The 36-year-old portfolio manager at T. Rowe Price left his home in Monkton on March 24 to run in the 23rd annual Marathon des Sables, a 151-mile race in the Sahara Desert in Morocco. (Morocco is a French-speaking country; the race name translates as Marathon of the Sands.)

While raising money for three charities, including Johns Hopkins Hospital's pediatric pulmonary division, Arricale will face temperature swings from 120 degrees during the day to 30 degrees at night. Using a guidebook and compass, he and the other 750 runners, including 70 Americans, will slog along sand dunes, salt flats and jagged plateaus over six days, beginning March 28. They will cover 52 miles on their longest day.

The race can be dangerous. In 1994, an Italian runner lost his way during a sandstorm. He was found nine days later and 30 pounds lighter. Last year, a French runner died in his sleep of an apparent heart attack, according to a race Web site. This year, a team of 42 doctors and nurses will monitor the runners' health.

While race organizers will provide water and tents, all runners must carry their food and clothing on their backs. Arricale's most cherished possession is the photo of his four children attached to his 23-pound backpack, he said.

"Jessie and I want our kids to see their parents living active and healthy lifestyles, setting goals and achieving difficult objectives," he said.

The Arricales' 6-year-old son, Jake, and 8-month-old daughter, Gracie, have children's interstitial lung disease, a grouping of about

100 lung disorders with no known cure. Their sisters, Emma, 4, and Sami, 2, have healthy lungs.

Jake has been hospitalized countless times in his young life, but continues to show improvement and now needs oxygen only at night.

Gracie began breathing rapidly last month, and has been hospitalized since. She will have surgery to implant a feeding tube while her father is away.

"When you breathe harder and faster, you need extra calories," explained Dr. Peter Mogayzel, a pediatric pulmonologist at Johns Hopkins. "We want to make sure she's getting enough calories to grow."

Last year, Arricale ran the Great Wall of China Marathon, raising \$60,000 for Johns Hopkins. That paid for Dr. Leland Fan, of Houston, an authority on children's chronic lung disease, to come to Baltimore to lecture and see patients.

Few people raise money specifically for the hospital's pediatric pulmonary division, Mogayzel said.

"This is a unique opportunity for us," he said. "We hope to fund pilot research grants with money he raises."

Arricale also is raising money for Special Olympics Maryland and Opportunity International, a non-profit organization that offers small loans to people in developing countries. He said he will match donations — up to \$10,000 for Johns Hopkins and up to \$1,000 each for the other two organizations. He also will receive matching funds from T. Rowe Price.

"We fund a foundation that supports our employees' causes here and around the world," said T. Rowe Price's president, Jim Kennedy, at a farewell party for Arricale on March 22. "We ask our employees, 'What do you believe in?' It's obvious Jeff is focused and passionate about his causes."

Built for wrestling

At 5 feet 7 and 180 pounds,

Arricale said he was meant to be a wrestler, not a runner. Because running events provide fundraising opportunities, however, that's where his footsteps have led him. He ran his first marathon in 2001.

To prepare for the Marathon des Sables, Arricale has run in four marathons since October — in Baltimore, New York, Arizona and Virginia. In February, he completed a 50-mile run in Texas.

In his home gym, he lifts weights, cycles and uses an elliptical machine. But his best preparation was at a running camp he attended in October in Death Valley, he said.

"We practiced running in sand dunes, and we learned a lot about desert survival," he said. "It was hard, but what I learned should help."

Organizers of the Moroccan race require all runners to carry supplies that include a whistle, a flare, a signal mirror, a knife, an aluminum survival sheet and an anti-venom kit. Arricale will add Tylenol, Maalox, Visine, Imodium and Ambien, as well as blister kits, rash cream and lip balm.

He has prepared seven plastic bags, each with food for one day. On Day 4, for example, he will consume 3,420 calories from Clif Bars, honey, nuts, chips, oatmeal and nutrition shakes.

He spent most of March running while wearing a weighted backpack. With his wife and friends joining him for an hour each, he often ran for five hours on the Torrey C. Brown Rail Trail. And he practiced running up and down the hills around his home.

"I've never been away from my family for so long," he said on Easter, the day before his departure. "But I'm hoping a lot of good will come from donations people make. This is all about helping others."

Anyone interested in contributing to any of Arricale's three charities may e-mail him at Jeff_Arricale@troweprice.com. To follow his progress, go to www.lisasmith-batchen.blogspot.com and enter your e-mail address.



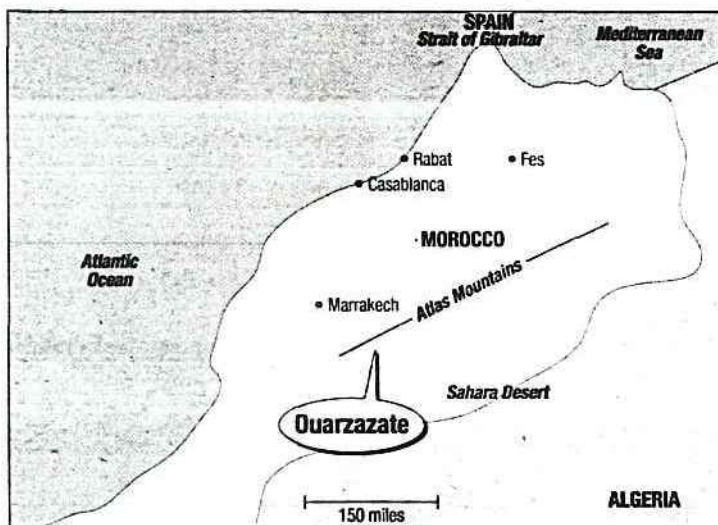
STAFF PHOTO BY HANNAH DE GAY

HOP TO IT Shannon Rowan, 6, center, and Kayla Ensor, 6, right, line up for a sack race during festivities hosted by the Hereford Volunteer Ambulance Association on March 22. For photos of visits with the Easter bunny and an egg hunt, see Page 15.



STAFF PHOTO BY JUSTIN KASE

Jake Arricale, 6, follows his sister Emma, 4, and father, Jeff, up a hill near their Monkton home March 22, two days before his departure for a 151-mile race through the Sahara Desert in Morocco.



HOT-FOOTING IT

Jeff Arricale, of Monkton, traveled to Ouarzazate, Morocco, on March 24 to run in the Marathon des Sables, a 151-mile race in the Sahara Desert.