

'Incredible experience'

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Steven Cohen had no intentions of timing himself. In fact, the Fair Lawn resident didn't bother to wear a watch and never looked up to see his time when he crossed the finish line.

Going into his first New York City Marathon, the 39-year-old had only two goals: to enjoy the Central Park crowd and not to be "one of those people who are in terrible agony at the end." And he wasn't. Cohen, a workers compensation attorney at Davis, Saperstein & Salomon in Teaneck, finished in 4:45:31.

"It was unbelievable," he said. "My name was on my shirt and I heard the crowd calling my name from the side. It was fun."

Cohen's plan to keep pace with his typically slower friend, Artie Bernstein, was foiled at the 20-mile mark when Bernstein started feeling tightness in his quadriceps. After another friend jumped in to stay with Bernstein, Cohen took off and finished the last six miles faster than the first.

Cohen, a good athlete in high school, played baseball, basketball and was an All-State soccer player at Wayne Valley. But despite years on fields and courts, he admits he was never a good runner. All that changed, however, when he saw his wife, Sarah, compete in the 2003 Philadelphia and 2004 New York City marathons.

"I was blown away," he said. "It was just so exciting, watching the race and hearing the people cheering. And I said to myself, 'Boy I'd really like to do this one day.' "

After failing to get in through the Marathon lottery and his first-choice charity, Memorial Sloan-Kettering's Fred's Team – a charity he donates to regularly – Cohen decided to run for Team for Kids, a charity that fights juvenile obesity.

In the weeks leading up to the race, he kept a printout of his donor list, which included almost 70 names, in his briefcase for extra motivation when he didn't feel like running.

"Once I started asking people for money, I couldn't turn back," he said, laughing. "I look at that list and remember, 'Well I really can't quit now.' "

Though he raised \$3,000 for Team For Kids, next time Cohen hopes to raise money for Memorial Sloan-Kettering.

"Given the amount of people in our family [who] have passed away or have been touched by cancer – including my wife's aunt who had esophageal cancer – I feel more personally connected to it and it would be an easier charity for me to raise money for."

Overall, Cohen was happy to have been a part of this year's Marathon.

"It was an incredible experience," Cohen said. "And it was just as exciting as when I watched my wife run hers."

The top two area finishers were Terrance Armstrong, 35, of Pompton Lakes and Hermela Romero, 35, of Guttenberg. In his first marathon, Armstrong clocked a 2:30:23, earning him 59th place overall. Romero, who finished 414th in the 2005 New York City Marathon, completed the race in 2:56:49, good for 645th place overall and 38th in the women's division.