

## TOWPATH MARATHON

# O'Connor's passion never runs low

### Sunday race the 50th for Aurora resident

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*Plain Dealer Reporter*

Rob O'Connor is celebrating the Big 5-0 with Sunday's running of the 15th Towpath Marathon.

No, it's not the Irishman's 50th birthday. It's his 50th marathon.

"It's a milestone," said O'Connor, who was born in Dublin, Ireland, and played rugby until a severe knee injury forced him into finding an alternative recreational activity more than 30 years ago.

O'Connor, 66, turned to running. He has not looked back.

"My first marathon was Chicago, 1975," he said. "My goal is to run on all seven continents. I've got three to go — Asia, Australia and South America."

O'Connor's most memorable marathon: Antarctica, 2002. The climate is hardly tropical.

"It was small race, about 80 participants," said O'Connor, who lives in Aurora. "You have got to be very tough to run this race. You're running up and down glaciers."

"The race started in a blizzard. It was 17 below zero. By the time we finished, it had gotten up to about zero. It was a fascinating run."

"It was like being on the moon. No one lives there."

Other memorable marathons: Athens, Greece, where the original marathon was run in 490 B.C., and the Marathon Des Sables, which is run across the Sahara Desert in Morocco.

O'Connor and his wife, Diane, operate a mail order catalog company — Creative Irish Gifts — which is headquartered in Streetsboro.

O'Connor is a five-year prostate cancer survivor. "The five-

### Towpath Marathon

**What:** 15th Towpath Marathon, Half-Marathon and 5K.

**When:** Sunday, 8 a.m.

**Where:** Cuyahoga Valley National Park. Start and finish line is near Boston Mills Ski Resort in Peninsula.

**Registration:** Marathon and half-marathon participants can register and pick up race packets Saturday from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. at the MD Garage at the Boston Store, 1556 Boston Mills Rd., Peninsula. There is no registration or packet pickup on Sunday. There will be race-day registration for the 5K only, beginning at 7:30 a.m.

**Notable:** A truly scenic course through the park, especially with leaves turning; half-marathon and 5K trail run are new this year. Parking available at Boston Mills Ski Resort and roads will close as race-time approaches.

**Info:** Call 216-520-1825 or online at [www.towpathmarathon.net](http://www.towpathmarathon.net).

year anniversary is coming up," he said. "It's fine. There has been no reoccurrence."

"It's something to celebrate." O'Connor is running his 12th Towpath. There will be no glaciers to contend with, but ... "It's my favorite marathon," he

said. "The course is beautiful. The organizers have done a lot to improve the race over the years."

The race begins at 8 a.m. on Sunday.

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