

THE ORANGE COUNTY BETA REGISTER

Homeless group runs Surf City Half Marathon

By [ELYSSE JAMES](#)

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TUSTIN When you're running, there's no socioeconomic status, no jump-start.

Everyone trains hard, and everyone starts from the beginning. That's why, said Stephen Tierney, he started a running group at the Orange County Rescue Mission's Village of Hope, a dorm-style campus where homeless people can get a fresh start.

"Everyone has to train, and when you get to the start you've got your shoes and shorts and shirt. Everyone's the same," he said.

The group, called Hope's Heroes, has been training for the Surf City USA Half Marathon in Huntington Beach on Super Bowl Sunday. The 12 Village of Hope residents will be running the half marathon for the first time.

"Not that many people can say they've run 13.1 miles," Tierney said. "Experiencing the joy of seeing them cross the finish line is going to be amazing."

Tierney learned of a group in Philadelphia called Back on My Feet, a running club for homeless people, from an article in Runner's World magazine.

"I thought, 'I'd love to be able to do the same concept here in Orange County,'" he said. So, Tierney contacted the Orange County Rescue Mission and got approval.

He posted a sign-up sheet at the Village of Hope on the former Tustin Marine base in September. In mid-October he held an orientation and the group had its first run on Nov. 2, he said.

At the time, there were 20 people. Now, only 12 runners remain.

They finished an 11-mile run Saturday and are resting up for the big run Sunday.

Tierney has run with them every step, along with his business partner, Paul Nienow, accountant Melinda Mergelsbert and volunteer Beth Lowe. Next year, Tierney is hoping to reach out to other homeless people to form running groups. He's hoping to form a nonprofit called Up and Running Again, which will raise money for running shoes.

The hardest part of forming Hope's Heroes, he said, has been getting the right shoes for the runners. He and the other volunteers spent some of their own money buying proper footwear.

"It's important if you're going to run this many miles that you don't have just any generic pair of shoes," he said.

Tierney, a partner in the firm Nienow and Company LLP, began running two years ago.

"I found the benefits to myself were just amazing," he said. "Some of the things I noticed were more

confidence in my job and feeling good about myself. Every week I could tell myself I'd done something I'd never done before."

Members of Hope's Heroes are experiencing the same perks from their training sessions four days a week. The group meets at 6:30 a.m. Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday.

"I've had students tell me, 'If I can run 10 miles, I can get a job. I can do this,'" he said.

The Surf City USA Marathon and Half Marathon is in Huntington Beach. Organizers are expecting 20,000 runners, friends and family members. The half marathon starts at 7:45 a.m. just south of Main Street at Pacific Coast Highway.

Information: runsurfcity.com, upandrinningagain.org

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