

CHICAGO MARATHON

Don't bet against this man

Chicagoan has taken unusual route to become a 10-year charity runner

BY DALE BOWMAN
For Sun-Times Media

Chuck Aron knows the home stretch for the Chicago Marathon.

"The Cell," he said. "Once you get there, you have to finish because all your gear is downtown — especially since the Red Line is closed."

So a North Side defense attorney — who lives 0.4 miles from the lakefront running path — calls the White Sox' park "The Cell"?

There's Chicago history.

Aron is a rare professional schooled in Chicago: high school at Lane Tech, college at UIC at Navy Pier and law school at DePaul.

Aron, 67, will run his 10th consecutive Chicago Marathon on Sunday for the Alzheimer's Association in memory of his late brother-in-law, Paul Bracken. He will be one of 10,000 running for charity in the 36th Bank of America Chicago Marathon.

His first marathon grew from bets: a \$100 bet that he could run a WLS-AM (890) event of 8.9 miles, then a \$200 one that he could run the Chicago Heart and Lung 20K.

"Then another much larger wager whether I could complete the Chicago Marathon," Aron said.

He did in 1978, running in a cotton T-shirt with a neckerchief.

Chicago Marathons were far different than the cheering million-plus now. Aron said it was more "Hey, [expletive], get out of the street. You are blocking traffic."

The neckerchief, which cools his neck, serves as a flag of individuality and doubles as an emergency tourniquet when he leads training with Chicago Area Runners Association.

In 1979, his can-do spirit nearly did him in. He ran the Montreal Marathon six weeks before Chicago.

"Not a good idea," Aron said.

By June, he had knee surgery.

"That is when I sort of stopped



running and walking, started relaxing more," Aron said. "I got up to a size 50 waist."

The return to marathons grew from more serious roots than

wagers.

Bracken, like the brother Aron didn't have, was diagnosed with Alzheimer's. Aron tried the Memory Walk but couldn't complete the six



LEFT: Chuck Aron, 67, of Chicago, runs in his first Life Time Tri Chicago in August.

ABOVE: Aron is hard-core enough to run the lakefront in all sorts of weather. | SHAFER BRYAN FOR SUN-TIMES MEDIA (LEFT); FOR SUN-TIMES MEDIA

miles. A two-year process of dropping 100 pounds followed. By 2004, he ran the Chicago Marathon for charity.

He has honed his collecting skills. With \$12,000 he has collected this year; he tops \$100,000 for the Alzheimer's Association. He had 123 donors this year, giving \$10 to \$500.

"Don't take no for an answer and don't be afraid to ask — or the other way around," Aron said. "Anybody I meet, I will ask."

His best time was 4:54:08 in 2005.

There have been iffy years. In 2006, he had kidney surgery; 2007 was the killer heat. In 2011, he was hit by a car riding his bike to pick up a race packet for the Magellan Ready to Run 20 Miler and had a torn meniscus.

"Took me a long time to finish, about the same time as the woman who gave birth after the race," Aron said. "She and I were running together much of the way."

His favorite section is near Sheridan and Addison, where his wife, Sara, waits.

"She refills my bottles, and I get a little kiss," Aron said.