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MN

Mount Everest, Tour de France on her list McGonigle, Louise

Teacher, 50, tests her mettle in Ironman

When Louise McGonigle says she has to run to school, she means run — literally.

McGonigle, a Grade 2 teacher at Nahani Way Public School, lives in the Islington and Eglinton Aves. area of Etobicoke. At least one morning a week she runs to school along Eglinton Ave. to Hurontario St.

At the end of the school day, she runs to the Etobicoke Olympium to swim 3,000 metres in the pool. Then she runs home. In all kinds of weather, she runs — every school day. On weekends she cycles 112 miles.

She plans to take part in two Ironman competitions this year. She will shadow the 21-day Tour de France on her bike and climb Mount Everest in November.

Not bad for a 50-year-old, eh?

McGonigle joined the Peel Board of Education 20 years ago and at age 31 decided, "the time had come to make some changes in my life."

She became physically fit. And, with her 50th birthday approaching, McGonigle set her goals for 1993.

The 27-kilometre run from home to school and back is basic training. She's hiked up cliffs in the Adirondacks and last year she was part of the Tour de France shadow. Cyclists who are good enough are allowed to follow the same route and, in some cases, set out a day prior to the leaders and cover the same route.

"You get out there on your bike and just go. These are Spaniards, French and Italians who live and breathe cycling. Many are professionals who just didn't have enough to be in a calibre with the Tour."

McGonigle is in the best shape of her life. She's taken a year off work, thanks to a Peel Board program which allows teachers to take a reduced salary for three years and bank the rest towards taking the fourth year off.

July 10, she'll be in Roth, Germany, taking part in one of the six triathlons from which you can qualify for the famed Ironman competition in Hawaii. The Ironman consists of a 2.4-mile swim, a 112-mile cycling tour and a 26-mile run.

"You don't just show up in Hawaii. You have to qualify," she said. Competing in the 50-54 age category, McGonigle stands a good chance of qualifying. And once she's done that she plans to pack her bike and gear and ride the Eurorail to Grenoble, where she'll join up with the Tour de France shadow event.

By Oct. 10, she plans to be in Hawaii for the Ironman. November sees her joining the Canadian Himalayan Expedition.

"You don't know if you're going to the top, to the roof of the world," she said. "There are a lot of factors involved, depending on how you do at the 20,000-foot and 40,000-foot levels. I've been told that six people will go to the summit and there's a chance I will be one of them."

Following that, she's off to New Zealand, "because there are lots of Triheads (triathletes) there." As for the spring, "I'm going to have to wait and take things as they come. Right now I've got my sights set on Germany and qualifying for the Ironman."

"I've been promising myself I would do this by the time I hit 50 and I'm going to do it."



Staff photo by Fred Loek

Will of iron ... Louise McGonigle will celebrate her birthday this year by taking part in two Ironman competitions. in November.