

## Marathoner Jim McCue conquers his Seventh Continent Marathon

Seven marathons on seven continents? Only the fittest and most demanding of runners could set such a goal in their lifetime. Madisonville resident Jim McCue is now one of those elite league members. In fact, he has only 462 men and 225 women as contemporaries, according to The Seven Continents Club.

McCue, a chiropractic physician, recently completed his seventh continent and it was quite an adventure. A safari, even, but without any violence.

He was one of approximately 300 runners from around the globe who participated in The Big Five Marathon in South Africa, in Entabeni, a private Safari Conservancy in the Limpopo Province situated between Johannesburg and Kruger National Park. Its name indicates the exotic variety of animals associated with the area and include the African Cape Buffalo, elephant, lion, rhino and leopard. African hunters actually coined the term “the big five” as these creatures are the most dangerous and difficult to hunt.

McCue’s interest in the Seven Continents Club was piqued in 2011.

“I had already been running marathons and was attempting to complete the Six World Major Marathons (London, Berlin, Tokyo, Chicago, New York and Boston). I was attempting my first international marathon in London when I met a gentleman on the marathon bus and he was telling me that he had just finished a marathon in Antarctica and had completed one on all seven continents,” said McCue.

“As he described his trip to Antarctica and the marathon and the people he met, I remember thinking to myself ... Wow, what an adventure. So much more than just a marathon. A life changing experience. Where do I sign up?”

McCue’s athletic origins date to his high school years, where he began running to cross train for sports. He resumed running to remain in shape as an adult.

“I always ran to stay fit,” said McCue. As a chiropractic physician we espouse activity, movement, getting healthy and staying healthy.”

He performs as he instructs.

“Running is a great way to reduce stress, increase cardiovascular fitness and manage weight,” McCue continued. “I try to practice what I preach. I started running local 10Ks and really enjoyed the camaraderie and especially the cold beer and red beans and

rice after the races ... only in New Orleans!”

All of this assisted in paving the way to his newly-attained world status.

”I graduated to half marathons and eventually marathons,” he said.

The African marathon offered an incredible course with a series of unique and memorable challenges, not only for the runners but for the organizers as well.

“We (runners and families) stayed at different locations in the conservancy,” said McCue. “My wife Angela and 11-year-old daughter Molly stayed at Hanglip Lodge along with 18 others. It was a bush camp where wildebeest and other animals would freely roam through camp and (we) could often hear the lions at night,” he said.

“At night we were required to call a ranger for an escort from our cabins to the main lodge where we would all gather to eat meals,” McCue continued. “It was a stunningly beautiful and rugged setting in the bushveld of South Africa.”

The Big Five Marathon was held on June 23, 2018, which is actually the early stage of winter in the southern hemisphere.

“The mornings were cold, in the upper 30s,” he recalled. “It would warm to mid 70s by afternoon and cool back to the upper 30s-low 40s at night.”

African heat is quite different from the high humidity of south Louisiana. “The heat of the day was a very dry heat,” said McCue.

The terrain presented its own intrigue.

“I knew this marathon was going to be like no other when the course inspection the day before in a land cruiser took almost 3 and 1/2 hours! I had some doubts the night before and lost a little sleep thinking about how or if I would be able to traverse the course and make the time cutoffs.”

Race day finally arrived.

“On race morning things almost never got started,” said McCue. “They had to wait for the elephants to get off the course...only in Africa.”

Again, the terrain was in its own category.

“The course turned out to be as difficult on foot as it appeared from the luxury of the Land Cruiser,” he said. “The words that come to mind to describe it are rugged, unforgiving, brutal. The course began on the upper plateau of Hanglip Mountain. The first section, approximately 9 miles, was run on red sand, dirt roads and hills, over loose stones and rocky, uneven terrain. At approximately the 9 mile mark we had to descend a 1.8 mile, 43-degree escarpment to the lower plateau and savannah,” McCue said, describing the challenge.

“This section was almost impossible to run. It had to be taken in a switchback manner so as not to fall head over heels...not a desirable option. At the bottom we were greeted with a 6-mile loop of deep unforgiving sand and strategically placed Rangers with rifles.”

Yes, this was lion territory, and protection for the participants and spectators was imperative.

“The lions had been tracked the night before, so we were told they were safely away from the course but safety was always a primary concern.”

McCue was impressed with the professionalism and organization of the marathon’s coordinators. “It was a difficult task, considering the logistics.”

Back to the race.

“Once the savannah and sand were completed, it was back up the 1.8 mile 43-degree escarpment,” McCue continued. “The vacant stares in some of the runners’ eyes before heading up, I won’t forget. Once back to the upper plateau it was another 7-8 miles on uneven ground with large rocks and stones, hills, and a loose surface before an uphill finish.”

McCue was jubilant upon crossing the finish line.

“I had made the cutoffs and finished in 5:47:47. My longest marathon to date, but all things considered (I was) just happy to survive this one. It was extremely challenging,” he said. “I loved every minute of it.”

Did he come face-to-face with any of the Big Five?

“As for animal encounters during the run I was pretty focused on the terrain but I did see wildebeest, ostrich, an aardvark, springbok, warthogs (but) thankfully no lions or elephant encounters.”

McCue, as mentioned, is a chiropractor at Performance Chiropractic/Advanced Medical Rehab in Mandeville and Hammond. He believes that running dovetails with his profession, as they both emphasize activity and health.

“During the Seven Marathon journey it began to become more about the adventure than the marathons. We’ve met so many amazing people and made some friends for life,” said McCue. “I got to run alongside some truly inspirational athletes from all walks of life and have been fortunate to see some beautiful places on this planet, and we’ve accumulated some pretty good stories along the way.”

McCue credits his family for their unflagging support.

“None of this would’ve been possible without my wife Angela and daughter Molly who have been the most amazing support and gear team. My wife actually gave me a shirt off her back when I got a little chilled on the upper plateau which made for an interesting optic! They have been with me on every marathon except Antarctica. My wife said, ‘You’re on your own on that one.’ We’ve made some memories for life for sure.”

McCue’s reaction to his inveterate interest in marathon participation, including his 7th continent completion, is passionate.

“I love the sport of marathoning,” he stated. “To me it mirrors life. You have to put the work and effort in it to be successful and need the ability to adapt to change and overcome obstacles like terrain, weather and injuries and that little voice inside your head that at mile 20 says, ‘you’ve done enough; it’s okay to quit now.’ It’s empowering to overcome that inner doubt,”

For further information, visit Marathon Tours and Travels at [www.marathontours.com](http://www.marathontours.com).

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