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Man half-way done 1,000-mile lap around PA

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By ALAN THOMAS Special to the Local News (DailyLocal.com)

Paul Mathison set out from in front of Wayne's War Memorial on South Wayne and Runnymede avenues in Radnor for a 1,000 mile lap around Pennsylvania on April Fools Day. Twenty days later, on April 21, he passed the half-way point.

"I've rounded the corner," Mathison said in a phone interview Thursday. "Oh my gosh—just 500 miles from home."

Mathison said he has been successful so far in making his statement about the upcoming Pennsylvania redistricting effort that was created by the 2010 census figures and the loss of one representative in the U.S. House. The run is an effort to draw Pennsylvanians' attention to openness, transparency and the logic of compact, un-gerrymandered districts from which federal and state legislators can be fairly elected.

The PennUltimate Run's purpose, according to Mathison's website, "is to place a spotlight on 2011 congressional and legislative redistricting and to inspire Pennsylvania citizens to push the legislature and governor to conduct this effort in an open and transparent manner and produce compact districts."

Mathison's smart phone with a GPS application allows people to track his progress on his Web site, www.pjmathison.com/pennultimaterun. Daily updates are also posted on Facebook and Twitter.

Mathison has copies of his news release with him. Pushing a jogging stroller to hold his gear has proved to be an attention-getter. People stop him and ask, "What's the run about?" he said.

He then starts a conversation. And he also looks for legislators' offices in the towns through which he runs and stops, introduces himself and talks to whatever staff is there.

He has attracted news coverage, too. Mathison talked about coverage by the Erie Times and by an NBC affiliate that did a brief TV interview.

“The news media have been hunting me down,” he said.

Near Chambersburg, a CNN producer from Washington, D.C., found him, put cameras on his head the stroller and his car and shot video of Mathison jogging west on Route 30. CNN is planning to air a documentary on Congressional redistricting and gerrymandering. And Mathison said he may have a spot in it.

The stroller has also resulted, he said, in three stops by state police patrols alerted “by calls about an emergency situation” that is, apparently, about some guy out jogging in the cold rain with a child (presumably) in his stroller. He said he can imagine the concerns of horrified moms.

He said one trooper told him, “You wouldn’t believe how many calls we’ve been getting.”

On Thursday night, Mathison said he was studying maps to find the best way to get to U.S. Route 6, which he plans to follow back across the state, heading east toward Scranton “with the prevailing winds.” He had followed Route 30 west to Pittsburgh then ran north along Route 8 before taking Route 119 to get to Erie and “the corner,” as he put it.

Mathison said he was also trying to “figure out how to find cheap hotels.” Sleeping outdoors was an option for which he had prepared, but the weather has often been wet and cold, so he said he’s “prepared to go to great lengths to get indoors.”

As a seasoned runner, Mathison said he knows that thinking about being half-way home is somewhat of a dangerous assumption.

“The half-way point isn’t until you’re 90 percent there,” he said. Accomplishing that “90 percent” factor will put him a lot closer to his planned lap around the Liberty Bell and the relatively short distance back to his starting point in Wayne, perhaps in another 20 days.

“It’s a big state,” Mathison said. But the run is “accomplishing its purpose.”



Photo taken on the shore of Lake Erie, near the halfway point of The Run, in the howling wind and cold, just short of the entrance to Presque Isle State Park.