

When last place is an accomplishment in itself



Katelyn Feeney has the strength to smile as she finishes the Lake Tahoe Marathon – in last place. Photo/Jessie Marchesseau

By Jessie Marchesseau

Eight hours, 45 minutes and 22 seconds after she started, Katelyn Feeney crossed the finish line.

It had been a long day, but the journey was beautiful. Feeney, 25, had just finished her first marathon. She may have been the 213 finisher, the very last one, but she had done it.

Her mom, Danette, was there waiting at the finish line with a smile and a hug.

“I am so proud of her,” Danette Feeney said. “I am so proud of her.”

The Lake Tahoe Marathon has been an annual event for 23 years.

Les Wright, the event organizer, has seen all sorts of reasons for running a marathon in those years. He said some do it because it's a goal which they have been working toward for a long time, some people do it because they have overcome a serious illness or lost a significant amount of weight, and some people do it simply because they love to run. Regardless of their reason, for nearly everyone, just finishing is an accomplishment.

"It's a physical challenge," Wright told *Lake Tahoe News*. "After my first marathon, I felt 10 feet tall for a month."

Feeney, who lives in the Monterey area, had signed up for the Lake Tahoe Marathon back in August on somewhat of a whim. She hadn't been training for a marathon or fulfilling some lifelong dream. She signed up "just to be able to do it."

"I wanted to run somewhere beautiful so no matter what the outcome was, it was still going to be a good day," she said of her choice to sign up for the Lake Tahoe Marathon.

She chose well. It was a beautiful course and a beautiful day. She walked most of the race and ran a little; she said jokingly that her running pace was slower than some people's walk. But she found everyone so supportive, especially of the participants in the back. People would drive by honking and cheering. People would offer her water bottles. One person who was riding by on their bicycle actually dismounted and walked alongside her for more than a mile, just to show her support and offer a little bit of company.



Katelyn Feeney will always be able to say she is a Lake Tahoe Marathon finisher. Photo/Jessie Marchesseau

I joined Feeney for the last mile and a half or so of the race. We talked and laughed, and after 25 long miles, she still had a smile on her face. She set our pace at a fast walk until the final corner when she summoned her last bit of energy to run across the finish line. Even though the finishing arch had already been taken down, the band had gone home and the booths were packed up, when she ran across that line, horns were honking, people were cheering and her name was finally announced over the loudspeaker.

Though this was her first full marathon, it wasn't Feeney's first race. She has participated in several half marathons in

the past including races in Africa and Germany when she was studying abroad. She always tried to get friends and acquaintances to join her in the races.

“It was fun to run people’s first half marathon with them because they get to see what they’re capable of,” she said.

It has been three years since she last did a half marathon, however Feeney had no doubts she was capable of finishing the full 26.2 miles of the Lake Tahoe Marathon.

“I knew my body could go that far,” she said as we walked toward the finish line.

On Oct. 15, 2017, Katelyn Feeney finished her first marathon, but it likely will not be her last. She has a new goal: to walk half the marathon, and run the other half.

“I don’t quite feel like Superman with kryptonite yet, and I want that feeling,” she said.