

TIMES ARGUS

2014 Death Race features a local favorite

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MIDDLESEX — “This is the ultimate challenge. Only consider this race if you have lived a full life to date.”

This is the rather dire warning that greets people considering the so-called Death Race in Pittsfield.

None of it bothers Jane Coffey, of Middlesex, though.

“It’s an event where you don’t know when it starts and when it finishes,” Coffey said. “You have no idea what the challenges are going to be for the next 70 hours. But I like the challenge of the unknown and trying to do everything they say. I think more people should try things like this that are hard.”

Coffey has already been in three Death Races. In the first, last summer, she was eliminated from contention for the coveted death skull, a symbol of completing the race, late in the event. Determined to finish, Coffey ignored the urgings of race officials and kept going.

While she did not receive a skull, Coffey did “unofficially” finish the race, as she puts it.

“I did the summer race in the memory of my daughter,” she said; the baby died because of an umbilical cord problem just before birth. “I knew I was going to try to finish no matter what they did to me. You have to have a purpose. When you leave your comfort zone, you really learn about yourself and learn that you can accomplish a lot.”

The second Death Race she competed in was last fall, as part of a team. This time she officially finished the race. Not content with having participated in two, she competed in the most recent installment, which began Friday. In preparation, Coffey trained in what some would call adverse conditions.

“For the winter one I ran at night in this cold weather. It’s just about making yourself go out there and doing something you don’t want to do like going out in minus-20 degrees, or rain and snow.”

The Death Race website goes on to say that the race is made to present participants with the

totally unexpected and to take athletes out of their comfort zone. Featuring such challenges as all-night hikes in frigid conditions, crawling through mud and barbed wire, running 2 miles through flowing water, and much more, the Peak Death Race certainly seems to live up to its pledge.

The race is supposed to break participants, physically, mentally and emotionally. According to Death Race promoters, 90 percent of those who enter the competition won't finish.

Although she did not finish the winter race due to a time cutoff, Coffey once again demonstrated her willingness to continue in the face of adversity. Even when it became clear that she wasn't going to complete the race in time, Coffey continued until the deadline was upon her. At midnight Saturday, after 30 hours of competition, Coffey's race ended. As a reward for her perseverance in competing right up to the midnight deadline, Coffey was allowed to keep her Death Race bib.

Despite not finishing, Coffey says this was her favorite Death Race so far.

"I liked the format of this race. It was a legitimate race, it wasn't just a beat-down," she said.

The Death Race in Pittsfield is put on by the founders of the Spartan Series, a combination of extreme obstacle races across the globe. Much like the Death Race, Spartan Races measure and challenge the limits of human endurance through severe challenges and time constraints.

Coffey loves the races despite, or probably because of, the intense conditions. And after giving birth to a healthy daughter following her first daughter's death, she also wants to show that she can still do things like this.

"I'm a mother. Not a lot of women do these races, and I want to prove that I can still do these things. I also want to set a good example for my daughter and I want her to know that she can be a strong woman too. You come out of it like, 'Oh, my God, I just did that' and it's like, 'Hey, we can really do a lot more in life.' It's pretty life changing."

Coffey has already signed up for the 2014 summer Death Race on the weekend of June 27, which has a theme of "year of the explorer."

Coffey said she doesn't know what that means, but she's sure it will be just as rigorous as previous races. Coffey will be competing in the summer race with Mike Pavlisak, of Havre de Grace, Md. Pavlisak has participated in five Death Races, finishing two.

"It's the hardest thing I've ever done except for parenting," Coffey said of the race. "They try to figure out what your strengths and weaknesses and to make you quit."