



## Chuck Aron

► CHARITY: ALZ STARS

**C**huck Aron's first road race made him \$100 richer, though it had nothing to do with his time or finishing place. After hearing about Run for the Zoo from another attorney in his office, Aron, not a runner at the time, decided he would do the 8.9-mile race.

"There was a \$100 bet on it and I ran it," Aron says. "I won my \$100."

Aron went on to run more races that year, including the second annual Mayor Daley Marathon—now the Bank of America Chicago Marathon—and started to get serious about the sport the following year, running the Ravenswood Bank Lakefront 10 Miler, the Montreal Marathon and the Chicago Marathon before knee surgery sidelined him for about a decade.

"When I ran Chicago [in 1979], I was down to about 150 pounds," Aron says. "I enjoyed the '80s as a couch potato and got up to 265 pounds."

Around that time, however, Aron's brother-in-law, Paul Bracken, was diagnosed with early onset Alzheimer's. To show his support, Aron went to Omaha, where Bracken lived, to participate in the local Alzheimer's Association's Walk to End Alzheimer's.

"I couldn't complete the walk," Aron says. "I started training and dieting, and the next year I went back and I ran the walk. Then I came back the following year and ran it twice."

In 2004, 25 years after his last marathon, Aron was 58: the same age Bracken had been when he died. To honor his memory, Aron decided to run the LaSalle Bank Chicago Marathon as part of Team CARE, the charity running team for the Alzheimer's Association that has since evolved into ALZ Stars. Aron has run for the team every year since, raising \$115,000 for the Alzheimer's Association in the process.

"It's a disease that's nasty," Aron says. "My brother-in-law was one of the smarter guys I knew. He was a program manager for AT&T. It got to the point where if you gave him a cookie, he didn't even know what it was or what to do with it."

During marathon training in 2004, Aron found it difficult to navigate the Lakefront Trail amidst the many groups, and voiced his frustration to Beth Onines, the training program manager for the Chicago Area Runners Association at the time. Onines suggested that he should become a group leader, which he has now done every year since 2005.

Aron leads 11:00 or 11:30 minute-per-mile novice training groups, primarily made up of women who have affectionately dubbed themselves "Chuck's Chicks."

"We have great relationships," Aron says. "I'm like the crazy uncle."

Throughout his time as a group leader, Aron has come to know many runners he routinely sees on the Lakefront Trail and has seen several of his runners go on to lead their own groups, often at a 10:00 or 10:30 pace, with CARA and Chicago Endurance Sports.

"It's great to see that," Aron says. "They started with me and wanted to do group leading themselves. It's really nice."

One particular Lakefront Trail encounter sticks out in Aron's mind, though not because he knew the runner from his training group.

"A few years ago we were out running, and it was a nice July day," Aron says. "This fellow comes up running next to me and stops and says, 'Dude, what do you gotta do to run with all these hot babes?' I said, 'You know, some guys got it.' The girls start squealing, and I say, 'What's all this about?' Later on, one of the girls posted on Facebook that she had the most wonderful day: the weather was beautiful and Bill Rancic was jealous of her group leader. I knew who he was—that he was the first winner of *The Apprentice*—but I didn't know anything about his wife being on *E!*."

In all of this, however, Aron's primary focus rests on fundraising for the Alzheimer's Association.

"It's not about me," Aron says. "I really try to raise awareness about Alzheimer's, is what it is."

In the past 10 years, Aron has also fundraised for the American Cancer Society and the Greater Chicago Food Depository and makes sure to donate to the charity runners in his group as well.

"I donate to each of their charities \$18," Aron says. "If you know anything about Judaism, the Hebrew word for life is *chai*, and it consists of two letters: the 10th letter and eighth letter of the Hebrew alphabet. When you give a gift of \$18, you're giving them the gift of life."

Aron has already run several races this year, including five half marathons, and secured his entry for the Bank of America Chicago Marathon in October. He will once again raise funds for the Alzheimer's Association as a member of ALZ Stars. You can donate to Aron's fundraising at [bit.ly/ChuckAron](http://bit.ly/ChuckAron) or learn more about the Alzheimer's Association and Alzheimer's & Brain Awareness Month at [www.alz.org](http://www.alz.org).