

Somerville

Expanding the runners' world

Athlete goes the distance for Brazilian youths

By Carin Zissis
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Jose Moreira has prepared for the Boston Marathon by rising at 6 a.m. every morning to run a 14-mile course on the Minuteman Trail in Somerville. Tomorrow's race will be his fourth marathon. He is focused on two ambitious goals.

One is to finish the race in two and a half hours. The second is to raise \$15,000 from sponsors to build a training camp for youths in Marcolino Moura, Brazil, the small mountain village where he was born.

Moreira decided to build the camp after working as a volunteer coach at an orphanage in Sao Paulo eight years ago. While working there he saw how running built the confidence of youths in his care. He organized a race and awarded the young runners trophies and some ribbons he'd won himself. He also made himself a promise.

"I thought, 'If I can get to America, I will open a training camp to help kids,'" says Moreira, who moved to the United States in

1994 to train for long-distance races.

Last year Moreira and his wife, Diana Hughes, began to make good on his promise. They established the Discover America Brazil Foundation and sought to recruit a small number of Boston-area youths and finance their travel to Marcolino Moura, where they will train alongside youths there.

The funding target is \$38,500. While the project moves forward, soliciting private donations and running gear in Somerville's Brazilian community, Moreira, 33, works two jobs. He is a salesman at DSW Shoe Warehouse, a shoe retail store in Downtown Crossing, and also delivers pizzas.

He has traveled back to Marcolino Moura four times in the last two years to sponsor races, bringing along used running shirts and shoes for the village's youths. In a region where most people work as laborers in sugar-cane fields, earning minimal salaries, families cannot afford such items.

"Most of the kids don't know anything about shoes. They don't know how to tie them," says Moreira, while showing pictures of grinning children and teenagers, many of them barefoot, racing down dirt paths cut through mango groves. "All of the parents in the villages come out to the

races," he says. He also explains that the kids respond with enthusiasm when their parents personally award them their prizes — usually shoes.

In December Moreira visited his village again, this time accompanied by Michael Copass, a Seattle native whom he met through the runner's club at the Somerville VFW Post on Broadway. He carried with him a 55-pound bag of running shoes.

"This trip changed my life," says Copass, who volunteers for the group. "The races show the kids that they can set goals and that there are people who believe in them."

Moreira has received funds and supplies from Somerville's large Brazilian community. He plans to hold a 5-kilometer fundraising event during the Brazilian Festival in September with help from members of The Somerville Road Runners, a nonprofit group that holds races for Somerville-based organizations.

In the meantime, the 26.2 miles Moreira will run tomorrow represent one more step toward bringing young people from Somerville and Brazil closer together.

"I'd like to be rich, but you know why? To help kids," he says. "Life's about following passions and helping others."



GLOBE STAFF PHOTO/PAT GREENHOUSE

Jose Moreira, who hopes to build a running camp for youths in his native Brazil, preparing for the Marathon on the Minuteman Trail.