Written by Carol Pomeday
Wednesday, 09 March 2011 19:03

Bruce Krier was surrounded by teammates Ann Chrusciel (left) and Mandy Eischen.
Photo by Sam Arendt

Bruce Krier is fighting cancer. His pals Mandy Eischen and Ann Chrusciel have challenges of their own. But the three are determined to run, swim and cycle Ironman distances with help from a Saukville YMCA program.

Three friends — Bruce Krier of Random Lake and Brown Deer, Mandy Eischen of Random Lake and Ann Chrusciel of Port Washington — are challenging each other and themselves to achieve Ironman distances in running (26.2 miles), swimming (2.4 miles) and biking (112 miles) during March to earn the Idle Ironman title at the Feith Family YMCA in Saukville.

“Bruce is really the motivating force,” Chrusciel said. “He’s an inspiration, but we give him a hard time.”

Five years ago, Krier learned he had stage-four prostate cancer and wasn’t given long to live. He’s in an experimental treatment program that has kept him alive and given him the freedom to enjoy it.

A year ago, Chrusciel couldn’t run on a treadmill for 30 seconds. Last fall, she completed a five-mile run.

Eischen joined the YMCA with her sisters two years ago to lose weight. They quit, but she lost 40 pounds.

Working out, she said, helps relieves the stress of her two jobs — as a teacher’s aide at Random Lake Elementary School and helping her parents run the Five Pillars Restaurant — while also working on her master’s degree in education. Eischen has only Monday nights and Saturday mornings free to be at the Y.

Krier and Chrusciel have been friends for 30 years, but he was surprised to meet her at the Y one day.

Chrusciel and her husband Wayne, who own Fireworks Popcorn in Port Washington, joined to become more physically fit so they can be active, fun grandparents.

“We have different workout philosophies. I like to join groups, and Wayne likes to work alone.

He lost 60 pounds, and I only lost 40," said Chrusciel, who also takes yoga, body pump and boot camp classes.

Eischen and Krier met when they were using elliptical machines next to each other. Soon, they were workout partners and friends.

When the Y was recruiting members for the Idle Ironman challenge, Krier suggested they join as a team, which allows them to pool their miles to achieve the goals.

He even ordered red T-shirts with their names to wear while working out.

"Only Bruce knew he could do it, but we decided to try," Chrusciel said.

"We entered as a team, but we're also trying to do it all by ourselves. This way, we have each other's backs. This is what some people do in a day, and we're doing it in a month. "

"Working out on your own can be monotonous," Eischen added. "But when you have someone else there, it pushes you to go a little harder."

For Krier, staying physically fit is crucial. The endorphins released make him feel good, he said.

"It's one of the few things concerning my health I have control over," he said. "Keeping my strength and energy up is a high priority, and activity produces energy. I have a lot of things going on with my body. I don't want my respiratory system to be what takes me down."

He lost 70 pounds last year when he was off all medications to give his body a rest. In addition to chemotherapy, he takes steroids and other medications to counter side effects.

Krier even works out on days he has chemotherapy, which amazes his teammates.

"What I love about Bruce is his attitude," Chrusciel said. "The other day, I asked him how he felt because I knew he had a treatment that morning, and his answer was, 'I'll be better tomorrow.'

"He has every reason to be down, but he's not. He's always positive. If he's not feeling well, it's, 'I'll be better.'"

When Krier's oncologist told him there was nothing he could do, Krier was assigned a research nurse who helped find his research trial.

"It took eight months to find enough men who had end-stage prostate cancer to start the trial," Krier said.

It basically reverses the way prostate cancer is currently treated with surgery first, followed by chemotherapy, Krier said. He's being treated with cancer-killing drugs without having surgery.

"One day, my case may be written up in a medical journal," Krier said. "I was never expected to

be able to do this type of thing (Idle Ironman). The whole body, mind and spirit thing (YMCA's motto) really works. You don't realize it until you experience something like this. It's not just gym and swim."

In addition to competing in the Idle Ironman, Krier has a personal trainer and joined the Y's LiveStrong, a free program for people battling cancer. Olympic bicyclist Lance Armstrong's foundation developed the program in collaboration with the YMCA national organization to counter the devastating effects of cancer by improving physical, emotional and nutritional health. The class meets twice a week with a trainer.

The Saukville Y is one of three YMCAs in the state to offer the program.

Krier turned over operation of the beverage and canning business, Krier Foods in Random Lake, to his nephew so he can focus on his health and the Bruce Krier Foundation, which provides scholarships to high school graduates and supports many community programs through donations and fund-raising efforts.

This month, he's concentrating on running, swimming and biking his way to an Idle Ironman title and encouraging his friends to do the same.