

# LAGUNA NIGUEL NEWS

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## MARATHON



CHEMA MOYA — ZUMAPRESS.COM

Marathoner Kathrine Switzer, the first woman to run the Boston Marathon as a numbered entry, poses with one of the photos taken of her 1967 run in Madrid in 2013.

## RACING WITH THE PACESETTER

**Laguna Niguel marathoner will run alongside Kathrine Switzer in Boston**

**By Shane Newell**

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A hundred-plus runners. Twenty-six miles. One mission.

On April 17, Christine Valdivieso will wake up early, put on her running gear and approach the starting line at the Boston Marathon. Though her daughter and husband won't be in attendance, she will not be embarking on the adventure alone.

Valdivieso, a Laguna Niguel resident, is part of the inaugural 261 Fearless team in Boston, a group of about 100 or so runners, mostly women, dedicated to raising money and awareness for a nonprofit created by marathoner Kathrine Switzer. The non-

profit aims to promote running and build a network of women around the world who are passionate about walking, jogging and running.

Having run in the Boston Marathon in 1967, years before it was popular for women to run, Switzer, 70, decided to return to Boston half a century later alongside runners from across the world, including Valdivieso.

### Overcoming obstacles

It started as a walk, then a jog, before finally becoming a run.

Valdivieso, 49, started running marathons as a way to get healthy after her daughter was born.

"When I delivered her, I was fine," she said. "But the weight didn't come off that I

had gained during the pregnancy."

She began training and started small before moving up to a few half-marathons.

When she woke the day of her first Los Angeles Marathon at the Bonaventure Hotel, all her stomach could handle was a single piece of toast.

"To this day, I would never eat bread that way," she said, adding that she normally opts for a full breakfast.

Her clothes were laid out the night before, a tradition she continues before every race, in an attempt to calm her nerves.

"You really don't sleep the night before the marathon," she said.

She ran the course in 2003 with her brother-in-law as friends and strangers of-

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ferred her jelly beans, Popsicles and pickles.

The entire experience made an impact.

"It's what got me hooked," she said. "It's that adrenaline and sense of accomplishment and pride."

Before running her third marathon, Valdivieso was coming home from the mall with her daughter after buying her clothes to wear for school pictures.

The two were parked at an intersection off Golden Lantern in Laguna Niguel when a drunken driver ran a stop light and hit Valdivieso, she said. She suffered burns, nerve damage and bruises.

"All I remember was the smoke and my daughter screaming," she said.

That accident, and then a cyst, derailed her first two attempts at running the Big Sur Marathon. Her third attempt was unmarred, and she completed the marathon along Pacific Coast Highway in 2010.

Over time, she ran more marathons across the world; when she registered for her 10th, in Boston, she was invited to apply to be a part of Switzer's running group.

In her application, she reflected on the adversities in her life, including the car accident. She said she screamed and yelled when she learned she would be joining Switzer in Boston.

## Coming back

Switzer may not be a household name like Abby Wambach, Serena Williams or Lindsey Vonn, but her impact on women's sports cannot be overstated.

Switzer began running at age 12 in hope of making the field hockey team in high school. She said running made her feel "powerful, free and fearless."

"I felt like I was discovering a new planet," she said in a telephone interview from New Zealand, the site for the bulk of her marathon training. "I felt like Magellan out on the seas."

At one point, Switzer

ran 31 miles in one day of training before the April 19, 1967, race. A journalism student at Syracuse University, Switzer signed up for the marathon with her initials, "K.V. Switzer," and was given a bib number of 261.

Switzer became the first woman to officially enter and run the Boston Marathon.

Near the beginning of the marathon, she recalled, a race official jumped off the officials' bus alongside the runners and grabbed her while yelling, "Get the hell out of my race and give me those numbers!"

The entire exchange was captured on camera, since the photo truck was positioned in front of Switzer on the race course. Photos of Switzer on the course eventually made it into Time Life's "100 photographs that changed the world."

Switzer later won the New York City Marathon in 1974, and she helped bring the women's marathon into the Olympic Games in 1984.

Now, she's returning to run the Boston Marathon 50 years after her historic moment and is hoping to use the momentum of the race as a launching pad for the group.

## Finishing stretch

Each runner, including Valdivieso, is raising \$7,261 for 261 Fearless in the run-up to the race next month.

"We can see the vision of this," Switzer said. "We firmly believe that each of these people are going to want to make positive change in another woman's life."

Switzer said she's most proud of helping with the Olympic Games and the creation of 261 Fearless, though, she added, she might not see the fruition of the foundation in her lifetime.

"Time will tell," she said.

Valdivieso said those interested in running for the first time can get a lot from the sport.

"There are so many amazing things that come from running," she said. "Clarity of thought, strength of the body, health, an overall ability to manage the rest of your life well."