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### **HANDICAPPED PARTICIPANTS BRING UNIQUE STORIES TO MARATHON**

Three men competing under the banner of Achilles International will each take different paths to the starting line of the ING Miami Marathon on Sunday, January 31.

Lance Benson was born without legs. Lanny Carrero, once a proud Marine, has endured the gradual effects of multiple sclerosis over the last 22 years. It took a car accident for quadriplegic Chris Holcomb to join them at the starting line.

The three South Florida men are bound by Achilles International, a worldwide organization that encourages people with disabilities to participate in running with the general public — with a common belief that athletic achievement has a positive effect on all areas of their lives.

There will be approximately 50 athletes with disabilities at the starting line of the ING Miami Marathon and Half Marathon on January 31 in downtown Miami.

Benson, a 36-year-old married corporate real estate executive, will “run” the marathon on a skateboard. It was the Miami resident who spearheaded a drive to bring the Achilles organization to South Florida in 2005.

“I was kind of touched by what they were doing with war veterans,” he said. “I just try to help out. Give them a hope and be a part of something greater.”

Five years later, the South Florida chapter’s nearly two dozen members and volunteers stretch from Palm Beach Gardens to Kendall. “A lot of these guys are dealing with things that they don’t know how to deal with,” said Benson. “They see me being able to adapt naturally and that provides a point of perspective for them.”

Benson has always been an athlete despite his disability from birth. As a youngster growing up in Raleigh, NC, he wrestled for his high school varsity team and competed in weightlifting. At 118 pounds, he could already bench press 336 pounds.

Now a veteran marathoner, Benson’s skateboarding style is unique. “The way I do marathons is not about competing, but about the spirit,” he says. “My hands are touching the ground directly, just as a runner’s feet are in contact with the ground.”

Carrero, 44, found Achilles International through the VA Medical Center in West Palm Beach. A rehabilitation bike that assisted with balance issues brought on by MS gave the Palm Beach Gardens resident his start. He now rides a racing bike and has completed four marathons.

“It rekindled that spirit and drive for competition when they stepped in my life,” said Carrero of Achilles. “I wasn’t ready to accept my disabilities. Achilles lit the fire. It’s not what you can’t do but what you can do.”

Carrero’s first neurological attack came when as a 22-year-old Marine his “right side went numb and I couldn’t walk or grasp an object.” Eventually more frequent episodes caused him to be discharged from the Armed Forces. A subsequent 9-year stint with the Broward Sheriff’s office ended when there was further deterioration in his motor skills. Carrero now plays “Mr. Mom” to his two children while his wife works.

For Holcomb, a 39-year old single parent, life changed in an instant in 2004 when he snapped his neck in an automobile accident in Vero Beach. After 48 days in a chemically induced coma and another month in Jackson Memorial’s spinal cord unit, Holcomb began life as a quadriplegic.

A transformation came about in 2006 when he went to his first meeting for Quad Rugby in a motorized wheelchair.

‘What are you doing in a power chair?’ he was mocked.

“That was the last day I used it,” the Palm Beach resident said of his switch to a manual chair. “From that point on my life changed. I learned that with proper technique and a good attitude I could live a successful and independent life.”

Holcomb has worked for Global Telecommunications since he was 19, and was able to return to the company two years after his accident.

“My journey has been a blessing,” says Holcomb, who counts skydiving on his list of accomplishments since his accident. “My injury has been an opportunity to experience things I never would have otherwise. I’m not afraid to do anything anymore.”

In 2009 while attending a meeting of the Spinal Cord Injury Support Group of South Florida, Holcomb was introduced to Achilles International. In his first marathon in Palm Beach last December, he competed in a 27-gear hand-cranked bike designed for mobility.

“As long as you have arm strength you can do it,” he says. “Hills and sharp turns are the biggest challenges for me. The Rickenbacker Causeway is going to be a big challenge.”

The ING Miami Marathon is another opportunity for the three to demonstrate that hard work and determination can overcome adversity.

“It’s a tremendous feeling to participate,” says Holcomb. “Achilles makes that happen. They provide the resources and encouragement.”

“The Miami Marathon is in my back yard,” said Benson. “It’s my city. I have a passion about it and do my best to make sure the city shines in the best light.”

***About US Road Sports***

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