

# Physician finds charity to honor collective ‘mettle’

Marathon runners know the elation they feel when crossing the finish line. For Indianapolis physician Dr. Steven F. Isenberg, 55, a head-and-neck surgeon and avid marathoner, his greatest joy comes not from receiving the finisher's medal but from sharing it with others who demonstrate similar “mettle” in fighting debilitating illnesses and severe disabilities.

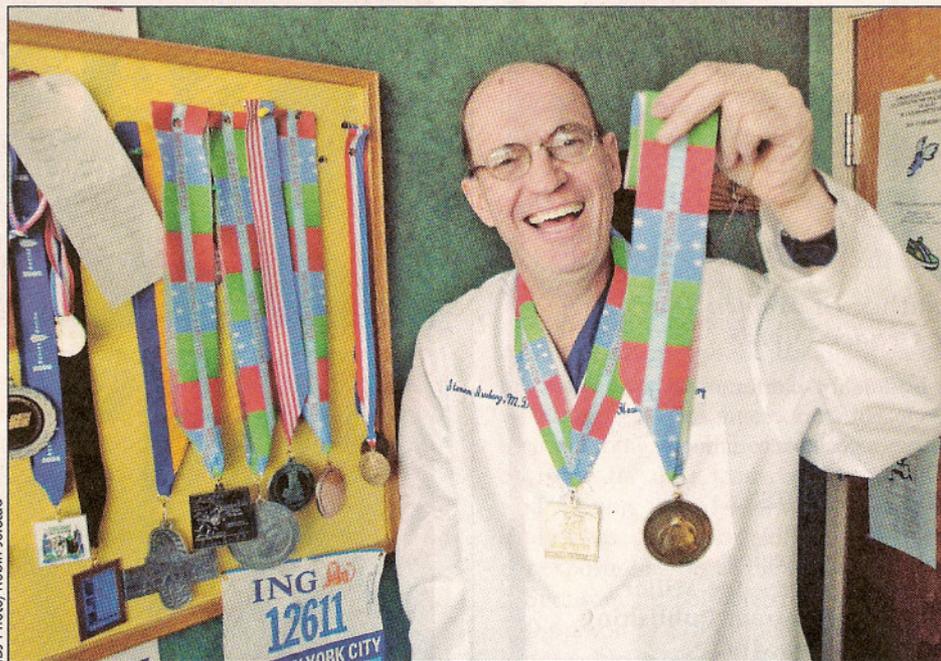
## **PROFILE** **STEVEN F. ISENBERG**

Isenberg began giving his medals to his patients and others battling serious diseases, but soon realized there were more deserving patients than there are marathons he can run. He knew there must be other athletes who would be interested in donating their medals.

That's the concept behind Medals4Mettle, a not-for-profit organization that Isenberg founded in 2005 to “celebrate and reward the individual and collective courage of all human beings.”

Medal donors and recipients are brought together on the organization's Web site, [www.medals4mettle.org](http://www.medals4mettle.org).

Competing in the Chicago and New York marathons last year, Isenberg qualified for the April Boston Marathon as a result of his finish times—3:32 and 3:53, respectively. He promoted Medals4Mettle at the Chicago Marathon and plans to do the same in Boston and at this year's Indy Mini-Marathon. Locally based Finish Line, a sponsor of Medals4Mettle, will distribute information about the organization at its booth.



IB/Photo/Robin Jerstad

*Dr. Steven Isenberg says he's running better now than 20 years ago—“an encouragement to anyone who thinks that you continually get worse as you get older.”*

Word is spreading rapidly about the charity, he said. “I try not to think too small. It began with just word of mouth in the middle of 2005 and now we have our 501(c)3 not-for-profit status from the IRS.”

So far, in addition to the Finish Line, Isenberg has secured sponsorship from Fifth Third Bank, Somerset Management, Walter Knabe Design, MARC USA/Indianapolis, and several other companies.

In spite of a busy medical practice, writing books and articles on measuring treatment outcomes, and serving as a fel-

low and elected member of the American Board of Otolaryngology Head and Neck Surgery, the physician, who says he was a “mediocre high school cross-country runner” at Shortridge High School, carves out time to run early in the morning and on weekends.

He also takes that time to solicit additional sponsors for Medals4Mettle. He hopes to secure national sponsors that will allow Medals4Mettle to grow—and perhaps to hire its first staffer to help run the operation day to day.

**”...like with any business, we're growing—we don't want to over-promise and under-perform.”**

*Dr. Steven Isenberg*

Isenberg needs the help. The businesses he calls on for sponsorships are usually closed for the day before he has time to call.

But Isenberg has big dreams for Medals4Mettle. “I've always had this picture in my mind of UPS, FedEx, Nike or someone in a Super Bowl commercial having a delivery of a medal come to a sick child that's donated by someone who ran a marathon,” he said. “I just can't think of a better story of a human being reacting with another human being.”

Beginning this year, a legacy card and a special Medals4Mettle ribbon will be presented with each medal to explain where the medal was won, who won it and why they ran that race.

“Ultimately I'd like to match donors and recipients online so a runner can run for a recipient,” Isenberg said. “But like with any business, we're growing—we don't want to over-promise and under-perform.”

He hopes someone connected to a big ad agency can see the value of putting a client's corporate brand with Medals4Mettle and will give him a call. •

*—Della Pacheco*