

Inspiring Amputee to race in Run for Angels

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Over 185,000 people undergo lower extremity amputations in the U.S. each year, according to the Amputee Coalition for America.

Last year, Deanna Campbell, of Newnan, was one of the 185,000. This Saturday Deanna celebrates one year with her new leg by competing in Newnan's Race for Angels.

Her husband of 15 years, Maj. Warren of the Patrol Division Sheriff's Office, will join her every step of the way.

How it all started

After a teenage accident, Deanna underwent the first of several operations to repair her shattered ankle. On the outside, Deanna was healthy and successful. She managed multimillion-dollar real estate properties along with a talent in visual arts.

Inside, her ankle hid another story. One that would ultimately be pushed into the forefront of her life.

Early in their marriage, Deanna joined Warren on his regular trips to the gym. A new habit for Deanna and uncharted water for her precarious ankle. Deanna's new exercise regimen went well until they began wind sprints. Wind sprints are bursts of running alternated with walking.

It proved too much. Tendons connecting her leg and foot couldn't withstand the pressure. Warren said, "We overused the tendons in the leg above her foot. Her leg would literally roll off the top of her foot."

Their 6 year winter season

In 2016, Deanna underwent surgery to realign her foot. Post-op healing brought far more challenges than expected. She was bedridden for six weeks, with ongoing limited weight bearing. Simple tasks required total reliance on Warren. Standing up, showering, driving anywhere or making a snack was now a two-person job.

"During that process, my mental health was not where it needed to be. My foot was not getting better. I couldn't understand why," recalls Deanna.

Still in rehabilitation, Deanna had a complete ankle replacement surgery six months later. More screws, more plates, more pain. Warren rearranged their home to accommodate her limited mobility.

Warren recalls, "There were days she just wouldn't eat, inactive from all the medication. Physical therapy started, and they don't play. They make it challenging. She's dealing with more pain, and we're hoping to see some progress from that. It was a dark time. We call it our long winter season."

The progress they hoped for didn't come. On top of widespread chronic nerve pain, Deanna struggled with mental and emotional distress. "With a brand new ankle and it's not working, there was a lot of confusion and disappointment," she shared.

Deanna and Warren knew they had to make big changes. Deanna started therapy, and they moved her care to Dr. Rishin Kadakia, an orthopedic surgeon at Emory.

After extensive X-rays, doctors discovered her body was not acclimating to her new ankle. There would be a third surgery. But this time with a 30 percent chance of amputation.

“We were just in shock. It was very real, and we’d never heard this before. We weren’t prepared to discuss it or understand,” says Warren.

After extensive review by the team at Emory, Deanna sought answers beyond the medical. She pressed Dr. Kadakia: “I want you to tell me what you’d tell your sister, your wife. What would you tell them? I want to work out with my husband. I want to hike Stone Mountain. That’s what I want to do.”

To have a life without chronic pain and longevity, it was clear. Amputation was the path forward.

New leg, new season

“When you go through surgeries like that, you need to do due diligence. You need to make sure you have everything in your toolbelt to prepare yourself and your caregiver for what’s going to happen”, Deanna said.

Foreseeing challenges ahead, Deanna began preparation. Familiar with post-op struggles, she was determined to emerge from the third surgery well.

Deanna began therapy at Sea Glass in Newnan and physical therapy at ProHealth in Peachtree City. Wanting to know who was making her new leg and where it was coming, Deanna insisted on an in-person visit to her prosthetic provider.

While not typical, they accommodated her and gave her an extensive tour of the facilities.

With her medical and wellness plan in place, Deanna emerged with more than a new leg. Pain levels dropped dramatically, allowing her to regain ample freedom throughout her day.

Warren, a servant at heart, loved his wife well after her amputation. He cooked meals with beautifully arranged dishes. They listened to Louis Armstrong. They found gratitude and positivity every day.

“We know recovery and happiness is based on intentionality,” he said. “So we focused on the positive in spite of everything.”

Deanna lost her leg, but gained much more. Freedom from pain, refound independence and a strengthened marriage bond with Warren.

Stepping into her future

Deanna will race on Saturday with her new blade from Levitate. The Heather Abbott Foundation awarded it to her just two weeks after applying.

Next month, Deanna will commence on her next goal, completing her certifications from the University of West Georgia Nonprofit Leadership Institute. An artist by trade, Deanna spent significant time serving at Backstreet Arts in Newnan during her recovery. Her time there carved a new-found love for nonprofit work.

Deanna will step into her new life as she takes off from the starting line with her new blade. Talking about future plans, her eyes brightened and she leaned forward as if leaning into her new-found purpose.

“I believe God goes after the one. I am that one. And I do have a race to run. I have a second chance, and I’m very grateful for it. I have to get on with living. This race is a 1-mile fun run, and life is supposed to be fun,” says Deanna.

Photos Courtesy of Deanna Campbell

Outside Dr. Kadakia's office after first post-op appointment, March 2023.





Deanna with oldest grandchild, June 2022.

Deanna receiving a blade from Levitate, December 2022.





Deanna and Warren at daughter Emily's wedding, 2021.

