



## BACK ON TRACK

**DR. WALTER GIANELLE DEFIED THE ODDS TO RETURN TO COMPETITIVE EVENTS AND SHARES HOW HE OVERCAME INJURY AND OBSTACLES ON HIS WAY TO THE PODIUM**

Written by **Jonathan Westman**

**L**ess than 5% of adults participate in 30 minutes of physical activity each day; and only one in three adults receive the recommended amount of physical activity each week, according to the World Health Organization. Your Doc's In founder Dr. Walter D. Gianelle, an experienced ER physician and former pararescue team member in the United States Air Force, certainly knows the benefits of exercise. He's an avid runner, biker and swimmer who regularly competes in regional triathlons, marathons and half marathons.

But after a 2018 procedure to reduce pressure and pain on the inside of his right knee, Dr. Gianelle was advised by his surgeon not to run any more. That development was both unanticipated and unsettling for the 63-year-old who's been active his entire life. "The surgeon told me that the inside of knee was shot, but that my outside compartment was good," Dr. Gianelle recalled. "So, I thought, Well wait. If I can lose some weight, get better-supporting shoes and find the right knee brace, I might be able to pull this off."

As he began his rehabilitation, Dr. Gianelle weighed 220 lbs. Part of his physical therapy involved walking in a zero-gravity treadmill. As he started the process, the machine assisted him by reducing the amount of his physical weight by 50 percent. Essentially weighing 110 lbs, Dr. Gianelle was able to walk pain-free, and the process quickly became an investigative journey to discover at what weight he might feel pain again. By manipulating the machine, Dr. Gianelle was able to walk all the way to 195 lbs before feeling discomfort. Thus, he rationalized that if he could keep his weight below 195 lbs, he could conceivably pursue his passion for running again.

He was right, and with a sound nutritional plan, a positive mindset and a specialized knee brace, Dr. Gianelle competes in roughly 12 races per year. We asked him about his experiences, advice for new runners, his long-term goals, and perhaps most importantly, what music he listens to when competing:

**STANDING TALL** Dr. Walter Gianelle claimed first place in the Male 60-64 Division of the 2021 Back Bay Triathlon in Snow Hill last September.



**ON THE GO** Dr. Walter Gianelle competes in an average of 12 competitive races annually, including events in Roanoke and Norfolk, VA, (top left and center) and Snow Hill (top right).

### HOW DO YOU TIE NUTRITION INTO YOUR RACE PREPARATION?

I eat really well. I eat a lot of fish, and I alternate between pork, chicken and fish, but fish is probably my biggest source of protein. I eat a lot of yogurt, a lot of fruit and a little bit of salads. I find that if I keep my caloric intake down, I usually can cut the weight.

### WHAT YOUR RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SOMEONE WHO WANTS TO GET INTO RUNNING?

Start out easy and listen to your body. If you're on the heavier side, getting your weight down is most important. For me, when I was getting back into it, alternating walking and running was a key, too. What you'll find is that your walking intervals decrease, and your running intervals become prolonged. I also recommend using a treadmill. It may seem kind of boring, but if you get some music going, you'll be surprised how fast 30 minutes will go by. Don't make it work, make it fun. I think those are the keys.

### WHAT'S ON YOUR GO-TO PLAY LIST?

I'm more of a soft rock guy — I like James Taylor and Leonard Skynrd. "Freebird" is probably my favorite song. I like the Steve Miller Band. "Fly Like an Eagle" is a perfect running song. A lot of the challenge is just trying to relax your mind and not think about the run. Just think about relaxing and enjoy it. The prize is at the end because that runner's high is real. It's a really nice sense of accomplishment. At 63, I thought this chapter of my life would be closed, but it's been reborn.



Photo by **Grant L. Gursky**

### HOW MANY MORE YEARS DO YOU PLAN TO RUN? DO HAVE A GOAL IN MIND?

I'm going to go as long as I can. You always face that crossing in the road. You either make a left turn and make your life easier or you take the more challenge route and turn right. Being in medicine, the Special Forces and starting a business, I've always made that turn toward the challenge. When you weigh all of the options and think it's right for you, pursue it. That's my plan for running — just as it has been in life. **CS**