

# Teacher to run marathon for children

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By Lisa Reisman

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**BRANFORD** » While you were burrowing more deeply inside your down comforter at 5:30 on a raw single-degree late December morning, Amy Stevens was lacing up her running shoes, attaching her Yaktrax, and heading out for an 8-mile run along the darkened streets of the Short Beach neighborhood in Branford.

While you were sinking into the sofa cushions, digging into a bag of nachos, and popping open a cold one, as NFL playoff teams fought to advance, Stevens, who will be competing in this Monday's Boston Marathon to benefit the Boston Bruins Foundation, was circling a 1-mile route at Hammonasset 15 times in a snow storm.

On those days when getting to your car meant navigating a sheet of ice and reaching the street required negotiating snowbanks that bracketed your driveway through the coldest February on record, according to "Connecticut Magazine," the teacher at The Children's Preschool in New Haven was single-mindedly logging miles on the treadmill at her gym.

Of course, when you have the chance to realize a lifelong dream, that's what you do. At least if you're Amy Stevens.

For seven successive Aprils, the 29-year-old, who moved from Boston to Branford this summer, watched the Boston Marathon. Each year she found herself increasingly in awe of the competitors, no more so than during the bombings in 2013.

"That really made me want to

show Boston was still strong and to support all those who were affected," said the slender, animated Stevens.

How she came to win a number in this year's race is symbolic of that same spirit of drive and determination.

While the Clinton native had played volleyball and soccer at The Morgan School and at the collegiate level, she recognized she was unlikely to meet the strict qualifying standards: for her age group, the Boston Athletic Association required her not only to have run a marathon, but one in 3:34, or roughly an 8:10 mile for 26.2 miles.

So she applied for a coveted spot on the marathon team of the Boston Bruins Foundation, a nonprofit organization "that assists charitable organizations that demonstrate a commitment to enhancing the quality of life for children throughout New England." To be chosen as a member she had to raise a minimum of \$5,000. That didn't daunt her. In November, she got the email. She was in.

It was a perfect fit.

"The Foundation raises money to improve the lives of the people I work and play with every day ... kids!" said Stevens, exhibiting her seemingly perpetual sunny disposition.

Over seven years of teaching preschool in Boston, she gradually realized early education meant more than exposing young children to numbers, letters, and shapes.

"Kids learn early on how to socialize — they learn how to get along with other children, and they learn good habits," she said.

**MARATHON** » PAGE 3



ARNOLD GOLD — NEW HAVEN REGISTER

Amy Stevens of Branford jogs in New Haven last week.

## Marathon

FROM PAGE 1

Among those habits: staying healthy and active. "One of the best parts about training for the race is I get to be a role model for my students," she said, adding that running races have taken on new meaning for the 3- and 4-year-olds in the playground.

Naturally, there were some non-weather-related obstacles along the way. There was the small matter of working three jobs — as a nanny to a family in Guilford and as an assistant art teacher at Cindy Stevens Fine Arts, her mother's Clinton gallery, in addition to her preschool duties. There was the stomach flu that inconveniently sidelined her for a few days. And the knee that, on occasion, pops.

But there were also unexpected benefits. A Paint Night at her mother's gallery to raise funds drew so

many responses on Facebook that she had no option but to hold two. Her father's business, Stevens Excavating in Centerbrook, came through as well. Not to mention countless friends and friends of friends and even strangers.

"Every single time I receive an e-mail titled 'so-and-so donated a certain amount,' I feel a rush," she said, her face breaking out in a smile. "There are so many good and generous people out there willing to give to such an important cause."

That's what got her up on all those glacial mornings. And why she's already surpassed her \$5,000 goal. And that's what, she's sure, will propel her from Main Street in Hopkinton, up Heartbreak Hill, and across the finish line this Monday.

To donate to Amy Stevens' fundraising effort for the Boston Bruins Foundation, visit [www.crowdrise.com/bruinsBoston2015/fundraiser/amystevens3](http://www.crowdrise.com/bruinsBoston2015/fundraiser/amystevens3). Donations may be made until May 31.