The AANA Wellness Committee is aware that many members are interested in being healthy and promoting wellness among others. This guest column is an opportunity to share some of the key factors that not only help each of us to be more fit and happy, but also help promote wellness in others.

Patti Bright, CRNA (Va.), has been a nurse anesthetist for 20 years. She has served the Virginia Association of Nurse Anesthetists (VANA), in multiple capacities, including president and federal political director. She has also served on many AANA committees and is a member of the Wellness Committee. In this article she shares three of her greatest passions: CRNAs, running, and People in Need (PIN).

Guest Columnist Patricia Bright, CRNA, MS

At first I thought why me? I am not a professor, a lecturer, or even a great speaker. What can I offer AANA members by serving? At the first meeting of the Wellness Committee, I finally knew: I can bring my passion and share our story in hopes of helping our members seek true wellness.

Five years ago, at a leadership retreat for VANA, we were brainstorming ways to promote our profession. VANA had been doing a great job of letting our state legislators know who we were during National Nurse Anesthetist Week, but we really felt we could be doing more to promote our profession. During the brainstorming, I remembered an AANA Fall Assembly of States lecture on public relations. The message: In order to bring attention to CRNAs, we needed to have a hook, something different, something to make us newsworthy.

An idea popped into my head. Why don’t we form a team of CRNA runners for the Rock ‘n’ Roll half marathon held in Virginia Beach each September? The race, which had just been named the BEST Half Marathon in the country, was right here in Virginia. We found many good reasons to do this race: We could get our membership involved, promote this event as a wellness initiative, provide a training schedule, and offer running shirts that would promote us. I again thought about the lecture: What is the hook—what can we do to make our organization stand out from the others?

As our strategy developed, we decided to not only run the race, but also to reach out into the community and raise funds for a charity. We chose People in Need (PIN), a Virginia Beach organization that provides hot meals, personal hygiene supplies, clothing, and medical care to the homeless and poor. PIN provides a hand-up, not a handout, and also helps with a recovery program for people with addictions.

To make our event more meaningful, we actively included the people who would benefit from monies raised. Our plan was to provide a water stop for the race that would be manned by CRNAs and PIN clients. We would make our water stop special. Our t-shirts and racing shirts would promote CRNAs, but also show that we were making a difference by having homeless people participate in making the race a success.

For added motivation, we hosted a traditional pre-race pasta dinner with the PIN clients as our honored guests. If they came to dinner, they had to work the next day. To motivate CRNAs to train, raise monies for a charity, and buy into the importance of this event to our profession, we made the event a fun weekend, with a hospitality suite open for volunteers and runners, the pre-race dinner, and a post-race party.

Promoting our Plan

We promoted this event at our district meetings, state functions, in our bulletin, and to PIN clients. We recruited runners, walkers, and volunteers. We notified the newspapers, television station, and race promoters about what we were doing. Elite Racing Systems, the production company that handles the race, soon knew who CRNAs were; they were excited that we were manning a water stop and intrigued that it included homeless individuals. They filmed an interview with me and showed this at the exhibit hall and on television when the race was rebroadcast. So, there I was, in running clothes on my favorite trail, being interviewed for a promo that would be shown once every two hours throughout the exhibition.

Our local newspaper published an article that included photos of...
our runners and PIN in action at the homeless shelter. The article ran front page on the day of the race and quoted facts about nurse anesthesia. A local television station interviewed us and our water stop volunteers. Because of the publicity, people cheered for us and commented on how special CRNAs were. The first year was a success: We had 20 runners and 50 volunteer CRNAs and student nurse anesthetists at the water stop.

Year Two
The second year we wanted to improve our publicity for the event. We invited local, state, and federal leaders to our pre-race dinner, where we showed a video about CRNAs and PIN and how we are connected. That year we made our water stop even more special: We added our own rock and roll band.

Year Three
In the third year we became a designated charity for the race. Our team, CRNAs ROCK, was listed on the website for the race and in the official race program. Our presentation at the press media conference so impressed the race organizers that they gave us a booth at the exhibit and sent a blast email to all the runners asking them to bring personal hygiene items for PIN. We were growing, but how could we step it up next year?

Year Four
Our fourth year was the biggest and best. We decided that if any of the homeless or recovering individuals served by PIN wanted to train for the race, we would train them and provide all the proper running gear. They would be part of our team. Much to our delight, two of our volunteers, Tony (a homeless man), and Melissa (who was in recovery), stepped up. Tony started out living in a tent in the woods and working one part-time job. Melissa was in recovery and doing okay, but she was still smoking and felt she was in a dead-end job. What was amazing is that as they trained hard for the half marathon and spent time with a CRNA coach, they changed their lives. Tony is no longer homeless; he has two jobs and a savings account. Melissa gave up smoking during training and is now a straight “A” student in college.

This year as we promoted our profession, showed our video, and took blood pressure measurements, we had a great story to share about our runners. As Tony and Melissa stood with me at our media conference, many of the audience were brought to tears. Our newspaper published a wonderful story about how CRNAs care, how they went the extra step, and how they actually helped to change lives.

Our pre-race dinner was amazing: The mayor and legislators spoke, saying they wished more groups were like us. We were again the designated charity. Our water stop has been named the best in any rock ‘n’ roll race. Our group of runners has grown, and spectators cheered for us, saying the CRNAs are the best. But best of all, Tony and Melissa ran across the finish line, finishing strong.

With this project, Virginia CRNAs have not only promoted member wellness, but have also made this a major publicity and government relations project. CRNAs reached out and helped others, personally as well as monetarily. Tony and Melissa inspired others from PIN, who commented that if Tony and Melissa can do it, so can they. VANA is ready to make that happen for others. Both Tony and Melissa showed that with a helping hand, they had the capacity to change. They now plan to be mentors. CRNAs ROCK, changing lives one step at a time!

CRNAs can take their passions, and a little time and promote wellness to a whole community. Although wellness is complex, we know that giving back to others makes us more whole. As CRNAs we are so lucky, we have a great profession and a great lifestyle, we just need to take our energy and be creative. When you use your passions, when you look beyond yourself, it can be amazing. Rock On!

Pictured from left to right are Robin Blanchard, CRNA; Ginger Finch, CRNA; Patti Bright, CRNA, MS.