**Staying the Course: Momentum and Endurance in Muncie**

The number of US citizens who compete in an Ironman is less than one in a thousand. But, walk into City Hall in Muncie, and you’ll find four.

IRONMAN, the world’s most famous triathlon, is a staggering test of endurance. In Ironman 70.3, athletes complete a 1.2 mile swim and a 56 mile bike race before finishing the day with a half marathon run. Ironman 140.6 is twice the distance for each event, and the grueling race must be completed within 17 hours. Only about 80% of those who enter the race make it to the finish line on time.

Muncie is no stranger to triathlons. The Muncie Endurathon (a 70.3 distance race) was established in ­­­­1980, and is the longest consecutive triathlon in Indiana. IRONMAN International bought the naming rights in 2011, and in 2021, Muncie was one of 8 sites worldwide to hold both a full-length and a 70.3 on the same day.

Mayor Dan Ridenour, a lifelong runner, decided to compete in the 2021 Ironman 70.3. “Ironman is something our City can be really proud of,” says Ridenour. “After we had to cancel the event in 2020, I felt it was important to participate in an event that means so much to Muncie.” Ridenour finished the race in 7 hours and 35 minutes – an impressive time for a novice swimmer and cyclist.

This year, the City of Muncie entered a relay team, comprised of Prairie Creek Supervisor Dustin Clark, City Controller Craig Wright, and Mayor Ridenour. Each team member completed one of the legs of the race, for a total time of 7 hours and nine minutes. Communications Director Michele Owen, who had also completed her first triathlon in 2021, was unable to join the relay team, but completed Ironman 140.6 in Maryland just 2 weeks prior.

Training even for one leg of the endurance challenge means a lifestyle change. Evenings and weekends turn into training sessions, and completing the race requires a strict nutrition and hydration plan. Athletes can run into serious difficulties if they don’t take on sufficient carbohydrates during the race.

A common mantra among endurance athletes is the idea that it doesn’t matter who’s the fastest at the beginning – what matters is not slowing down. This principle also applies to successful administrations –dedication, consistency, and sticking to a long-term plan are valuable traits in civil servants.

For example, many elected officials choose to resurface as many roads as possible in the first few years of their term, which makes for a good story and smooth driving for a little while. Resurfacing, however, doesn’t fix structural problems, and the smooth blacktop falls apart quickly. Ridenour’s administration has committed to completely milling and repaving roads, which lasts 12-15 years longer. Through careful budgeting, the administration was also able to purchase milling and paving equipment, which means the Streets Department can complete projects in-house, rather than using expensive outside contractors. All of this means that fewer roads have been paved so far, but the City will be able to save money, pave more roads, and enjoy long-lasting blacktop for decades to come.

Whether on the race course or in the office, Muncie is cultivating momentum and teamwork. The right team, with the right equipment, and the right long-term plan can accomplish anything – and Muncie is on track to go the distance.