

# I can't help myself: I'm psyched for MADD race

BY ELIZABETH SANCHEZ  
esanchez@bakersfield.com

I'm no Allyson Felix or Emma Coburn, because I can neither sprint as fast nor run as long as either of those incredible female athletes.

But I do enjoy running, and I would consider myself a decent runner.

And as a runner, I can be extremely competitive, so I'm excited to run the Bakersfield Walk Like MADD race.

Of course it would be nice to win the race, but it doesn't matter who wins. What matters is bringing awareness to the 4,223 DUIs, just in 2015, nearly as shocking as 2014's total of 4,923, according to the Kern County District Attorney's Office. In 2006, the deadliest year for DUI-related crashes countywide, 15

people were killed in such crashes? So MADD is using this race to say, "Drunk Driving Ends Here."

Well, my motivation to improve awareness about the problem was quickly heightened when a few colleagues questioned my ability to beat Vince Fong, a candidate for the 34th Assembly District. Of course, they didn't mean to offend me, so I didn't take it personally.

Much. They simply meant that Vince has been around the block once or twice when it comes to racing and he just may be a little more fit than I am.

Well, not so fast, people. Let's go back to February, when we both ran in Cal State Bakersfield's PEAK Club Valentine's Run. Fong, who did a great job, ran his

5K in 33 minutes and 53 seconds. I ran the race in 23 minutes and 38 seconds.

Like I said, I'm no Felix, but when my competitiveness kicks in, I feel like Felix.

Now Aaron Perlman — and I'm not sure if he is running the MADD 5k — is a different story. In November 2015, he ran a 5k at the BPD Memorial Run in 21 minutes and 10 seconds.

The last time I ran a 5K time even close to that was 2010, when I was a senior at Centennial High School.

But this race could go either way for Vince and me. We both got crushed by Perlman at the BPD Memorial Run. But Fong did beat me with a time of 35:24, a minute and a half better than my 36:55. Of course, I was running with my pregnant

cousin.

But, like I said, this is all about bringing awareness. So Vince, I hope you and I have a fun race together.

So, back to raising money for MADD. Team TBC, which includes Education Reporter Harold Pierce and Digital News Producer Charmaine Cleveland, as well as systems guru Roland Reyes and his friend John Neri, has a lot of work to do. We've only raised \$10 for the organization, while Eyewitness News, our competitor, has raised \$800. And the Kern County District Attorney's Office has raised more than \$6,000.

We are being destroyed by others before the race even begins. So it's time to step up my game and start raising money for MADD.

If you would like to donate



FACEBOOK

Louis Amestoy, Aaron Perlman and Vince Fong pose at the BPD Memorial race. Fong wrote on Facebook, "Tough 5k run this morning but all to support the Bakersfield Police Memorial. Did my best to hang with these guys. Aaron Perlman is one fast weatherman!"

to MADD or register for the race/walk, visit [walklike-madd.org](http://walklike-madd.org). Registration is just \$30, and the deadline is Sept. 23 at 5 p.m.

The race, set for Satur-

day, Sept. 24, will be at The Park at Riverwalk. It starts at 8 a.m. Check-in is from 6:30 a.m. to 7:45 a.m.

Come watch me leave Vince Fong in the dust.

## SOUND OFF

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call, in both cases.

Second, our bread and butter is and always will be local news. There's a tremendous amount of interest in the presidential race, no doubt, but unless there's a major story out there, local news will take precedence over national or international. In the case of our Sept. 11 front page, news that the 14-acre patch of base dirt at one of the city's busiest intersections was finally being developed qualified as our top story.

And third, as I just suggested, the only hard and fast rule about selecting a front page story and weighing the relative importance of everything else, is just this: There is no hard and fast rule. Many factors, time-

liness chief among them, come into play. And, looking at it now, I'd do it the same way today.

Clinton's "deplorable" comment has grown news-wings over the past several days. At the time she said it, it just wasn't the semi-big deal it is now.

I'm not shocked Gallup polling reveals dismal approval ratings for the media. I see three reasons.

One, we deserve it. The media have not covered the campaign well. Both candidates, especially Trump, have gotten away with misleading and false statements, and the most essential aspects of evaluating presidential competency, knowledge and understanding of a complex world, have gotten little play. I attended a meeting of the American Society of Newspaper Editors this past week, and one

speaker said it best: After this is all over, journalists need to take a page from the post-2008 Republican Party and perform a self-autopsy. We're doing some things wrong and we need to fix them.

Two, both candidates have successfully ridden herd over the media. Clinton has been almost completely opaque, refusing to hold press conferences and giving misleading explanations for things like her pneumonia. Trump has outright vilified the media, portraying them as biased and even going so far as to ban some outlets, including the Washington Post, from his rallies. If you're a Trump supporter and he says the media are out to get him, what are you going to say when Gallup calls?

Third, media are more diluted and partisan than ever.

Liberals don't trust Fox News and its ilk and conservatives don't trust MSNBC and its ilk. So I can't say I blame people for feeling the way they do. We should feel lucky we're at 32 percent.

**Reader: What a pleasure to read the two fine articles in the Sept. 16 TBC about Bakersfield College**

— Jeff Evans, who always does a great job in sports reporting, and Jeremy Staat, BC graduate and former NFL player! Kudos to them! Bakersfield College has been home to the Loken family since 1956 when my husband was recruited to be the first gymnastics coach at the brand new college "on the hill": It has been a wonderful 60 years, thanks to the welcoming city that supports Bakersfield College and provides educational opportunities like no other community college in the nation. Proud to be a Bakersfield Renegade!

— Rita Loken

**Reader: Love the new look of bakersfield.com!**

Easier to find stuff and much cleaner.

— Bill Deaver

**Price:** Yes, we have completely redesigned the website, and it indeed looks much better. And it's more functional. We still have some kinks to work out, but so far so good.

I'll have more on this next week.

Robert Price and The Californian welcome your comments and suggestions. To offer your input by phone, please call 395-7649 and leave your comments in a voice-mail message or send an email to [soundoff@bakersfield.com](mailto:soundoff@bakersfield.com). Please include your name and phone number. Phone numbers and addresses won't be published.

## Kidnapping case gets bitter ending

BY MICHAEL DOYLE  
McClatchy Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON — A long and emotional legal fight that began with the 2006 kidnapping of a Sacramento Valley man in Iraq has fizzled to an unceremonious conclusion.

The father and stepmother of Redding native Joshua Munns pressed their claims against the federal government for years, in one court after another. But in a brief decision Thursday, a judge ended the battle that had illuminated the wartime world of security contractors.

Citing a "failure to prosecute," Judge Margaret M. Sweeney of the U.S. Court of Federal Claims dismissed the suit brought by the parents of Munns and two other security contractors. Sweeney acted after the family members' Sacramento-based attorney, William W. Palmer, did not file a response to the Justice Department's motion to dismiss.

In a telephone interview Friday, Palmer noted that he had pursued the litigation pro bono for many years, against a deep bench of Justice Department attorneys.

"It got to the point where we ran out of resources," Palmer said. "It's been a long, tough row to hoe."

Palmer added that the families' complaints had helped prompt the Obama administration in June 2015 to revise a former policy that had blocked relatives from communicating with foreign kidnapers. Some family members in other cases said they had been threatened with prosecution if they negotiated ransoms.

Appointed to the bench by President George W.

Bush, Sweeney followed other federal judges in Sacramento and San Francisco who had previously rejected, on different grounds, the family members' various legal claims spurred by the kidnapping.

The three men, and two others, were seized while guarding a 46-truck convoy near the Kuwait border in November 2006.

"They were tortured and eventually killed," Justice Department trial attorney Sean Siekkinen recounted in a March 2016 legal filing.

The other two kidnapped Crescent Security Group contractors whose family members were part of the lawsuit were John Roy Young of Kansas City, Mo., and Jon Cote of Buffalo, N.Y. All three men were U.S. military veterans.

Munns started working for Crescent in July 2006. Following his kidnapping, and a brief appearance in a video that McClatchy viewed in December 2007, his remains were recovered in March 2008.

But while acknowledging the three Crescent employees were "tragically murdered," Siekkinen said the "contractor or insurance companies, not the government, are responsible for the monetary damages sought" by the family members.

Family members thought otherwise, and in court filings they shed light on the government's relationship with and alleged shortcomings of the Crescent Security Group, a Kuwait-based company that has now apparently closed.

"It was like chasing a phantom," Palmer said of the company on Friday.

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