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A gruelling desert run for a good cause

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Running across the Sahara, from left: Colin Nanka, [Sandy Johnson](#), Gavin Lucas, Alison Simpson and Stéfan Danis. (Erin Houghton for The Globe and Mail)



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The Donors: [Sandy Johnson](#) and team

The Gift: Raising \$100,000

The Cause: The National Advertising Benevolent Society

[Sandy Johnson](#) has been a competitive runner for most of her life, so when a colleague told her about a 250-kilometre run across the Sahara Desert, she couldn't wait to give it a try.

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“I said, ‘I would love to do that,’” recalled **Ms. Johnson, a vice-president at NexCareer, a Toronto-based career management firm.**

She got her chance last fall when Stéfán Danis, chief executive officer of Mandrake Management Consultants, started putting together a 10-member team for this year’s race, which is part of a series of endurance events called 4 Deserts. “I was the first one to register,” said Ms. Johnson, who at 52 is the oldest member of the team.

The group, made up of people from the communications and marketing fields, has decided to turn their run into a fundraiser for the National Advertising Benevolent Society, a charity that supports people in the industry who are in financial need.

Ms. Johnson, who is on the charity’s board, said the society serves a crucial purpose. “This is an industry which certainly has had challenges with layoffs,” she noted.

The team plans to raise \$100,000, and their endeavour won’t be easy. The race involves running a marathon a day across the Sahara desert for four days and then 80 kilometres on the fifth day (the last leg, which comes after a day off, is a relatively easy 10k). The race starts outside Cairo, circles around the desert and finishes at the pyramids.

Competitors also carry all their supplies. “Nobody is giving you valet service at the end of the day,” Ms. Johnson said.

The other members of the team are Mr. Danis, Alison Simpson, Anne-Marie Tseretopoulos, Paulo da Silva, David Gibb, Gavin Lucas, Colin Nanka, Mariska Kempers and Pat Sullivan.

Ms. Johnson is taking a philosophical approach to the challenge. “I look at it as, here’s an opportunity to explore something new and you don’t know how the whole thing is going to unfold. My experience is most people end up in a better place in the end.”

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