

Helping others was her passion

By JOHN BARNHART
STAFF WRITER

Saturday, Oct. 19 began as a beautiful autumn morning, crisp and cool. It was a perfect day for a run and Sabrina Bugay-Willis, the Bedford Area Family YMCA's wellness director, was training to run in the Richmond Marathon, a 20-mile race. As usual, she ran with her favorite running partner, her husband Kevin. The run ended in tragedy when the couple, along with a third running partner, were struck by a pickup truck. Kevin is still in a leg brace, hobbling on crutches. Sabrina died of her injuries that morning.

Kevin Willis met Sabrina Bugay when the two were students at James Madison University (JMU). Kevin, a Bedford native and son of Ray Willis, was a finance major. Sabrina, the youngest of Domingo Bugay's seven children, came from Chesapeake. Mr. Bugay, a 30-year veteran of the United States Navy, settled there after his retirement. Sabrina was working on a degree in fashion merchandising.

Kevin was very impressed with her from the beginning.

"I had seen her and desperately wanted to meet her," he recalled.

He got a date with her and, during the course of that first date, she told him that she was going out for a run the next day and invited him to join her. Sabrina was a runner. She ran cross country and indoor and outdoor track, accumulating 10 varsity letters before graduating from JMU in 1991. Kevin had never run more than two miles in his life. He was not a runner.

"I lied and told her I was," he said.

Sabrina took him on a 10-mile run at the end of which an exhausted Kevin confessed. He asked if they could just go out on regular dates in the future.

"Whatever ego I had, she done wore it out," Kevin said.

Sabrina, however, turned him into a runner. Since then, the couple ran together in eight marathons, as well as other races, in 15 different states. She was his coach and personal fitness trainer. Kevin said that she really enjoyed introducing the sport of running to people.

He couldn't beat her in a race. Normally, the best that he could do was keep up with her. The exception to that was during 2000. That year he beat her consistently, and bragged about it. There was just one little detail that he

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Kevin Willis and his wife, Sabrina, with their infant daughter, Hannah on a vacation in Virginia Beach.