



**E<sup>3</sup> WELLNESS**  
**ENGAGE · EDUCATE · EMPOWER**

*"County of Marin Employee Wellness Program"*

Meet  
Jeff Wong  
CAO  
&  
Jenny Collings  
HHS



## **Sharing is caring, sharing is connecting**

**LET'S INSPIRE EACH OTHER**

BY KORI GRAFF & CHRIS SHAW

The intention behind sharing our different journeys in life is to encourage us all to lean into adventure, fight for fulfillment and give back to our community. Here's a great County story featuring Jenny Collings and Jeff Wong, who inspires us with their connection through their Affinity Group, MAPLE (Marin Asian American Public Local Employees) and a passion for running. With grit and guidance, this marathon mentor and mentee friendship experienced perseverance and personal growth.

Jenny Collings, Bi-lingual Eligibility Worker in HHS would normally have never crossed paths with Jeff Wong, Planning and Project Manager in the CAO in their County jobs. However, through their membership with the Affinity Group, MAPLE (Marin Asian American Public Local Employees) they met, and Jenny's lifestyle is healthier because of their connection!

Jenny was President of MAPLE in 2018-2019 and wanted to organize an activity for members outside of work. She organized a group of MAPLE members to run the 2019 Marin County Half Marathon 5K and 10K held on April 28, 2019. Ten MAPLE members participated in the run. For many, like Jenny, they had never participated in a run prior to this event. Jenny ended up successfully completing the 10K run. Jeff, who is an avid runner, completed the Half Marathon.

After that initial run, Jenny was inspired by Jeff's abilities and asked Jeff to coach her so she could complete a full marathon. He agreed, and on November 16, 2019, Jenny completed the Northface Endurance Challenge Marathon Race. Jeff pointed that, for a first marathon, Jenny picked one of the hardest mountain marathons to complete. It includes over 5,000 feet of climbing on technical trails in West Marin!

This year, Jenny's goal is to repeat the Northface Endurance Challenge, but to finish the 50K run. Jeff, who has completed 17 marathons and 17 ultra-marathons, is working towards competing in the Tahoe Rim Trail 100 Mile Endurance Run which includes over 18,000 feet of climbing in a 35 hour time limit.

This seems like an unexpected benefit from joining an Affinity Group? What other benefits have you found from joining MAPLE?

Jenny: In MAPLE, I found a group of hardworking, kind-hearted and amazing people. I have learned a lot and gained a lot from being a part of the group. I even did something I had never thought possible before – I completed a marathon!

Jeff: It is encouraging to see other Asians grow and contribute. Everyone is genuine and stories are often shared of similar background experiences.

Do you have any advice for someone wanting to accomplish something big, or craving personal growth?

Jenny: 3 S's! Simple, Specific, and Stick to it. I pick a Simple plan that works for my lifestyle, set a Specific goal of what I want to achieve and Stick to it.

Jeff: I want to be sensitive with this question because I understand that for some people, just surviving the day is a victory. However, every year I make it a goal to try and do something that I think stretches beyond what I am current capable of doing. In other words, go "Beyond Yourself". Also, every morning I ask myself, "what is the best thing I can do today?" Sometimes the answer is run up Mt. Tam. But sometimes the answer is rest and sleep in. Sometimes when people train for a race, life happens and a few workouts are missed. It is important not to stress about a few missed workouts that don't really affect much overall. Consistency is the key in distance running and life.

It is important to just keep moving forward with the belief that you will get there.

**Any words of advice for people having a hard time getting started?**

**Jenny:** Try different things until you discover something that you enjoy doing and don't be afraid of trying something new. Running was new to me, I never thought that running would be something that I would love, especially long distance running. Throughout my life, I was always a fan of HIIT (high intensity interval training). Now I get excited about getting up at 5am to go on a 10 mile run! Also, it is important to find the right support system. I was so lucky to have Jeff as my mentor. Jeff did not just give me the right tools and knowledge but he also spread his love of running to me. Friends and mentors are a wonderful way to help you stay motivated, accountable, and interested in your new hobby!

**Jeff:** Most of the successful running buddies that I know have three types of running friends: 1) runners who are better than you; 2) runners who are just like you; 3) runners who are less experienced than you are whom you can mentor. While it is best to have all three types, even having one running type as a buddy can get you through hard times. Also, having these three types of friends can apply to any aspect of personal enrichment, not just running.

**Any encouragement?**

**Jenny:** I am echoing Jeff on this one. In the beginning, I focused on getting ready for the race but going outside so often changed my perspective. The beautiful scenery

evoked a feeling of contentment for me which was an amazing motivation throughout my training and even on my race day. The race wasn't the end-goal that I originally thought either. Now that it is over I continue to run often – enjoying the beautiful sunrise, the fresh air, the birds singing, and the freedom of being in nature. Just give it a try and I think you will like it too!

**Jeff:** Beauty. Find the beauty in what you are doing. Sometimes when I run along the west side of Marin, it feels like I am in a constant state of peace regardless of what is going on in other parts of my life. (see sunrise photo below)

**Jeff, I understand your next goal is quite the undertaking.**

I am currently training to compete in the Tahoe Rim Trail 100 Mile Endurance Run with the goal of just finishing the event before the 35-hour cutoff. The race includes +18,000 feet of climbing at high elevations. If I finish, it will be my first completion of a "Hundo" race. I attempted this race the last two years, but did not finish each time. This year I hired a coach, Bree Lambert Sanders, who has won this race 3 times. In many ways, coaching Jenny encouraged me to find a coach for myself!

**"Consistency is the key in distance running and life."**

-Jeff Wong

**"Now that it is over (the race) I continue to run often – enjoying the beautiful sunrise, the fresh air, the birds singing, and the freedom of being in nature."**

-Jenny Collings

Jeff Wong and friends at the top of Mount Tam enjoying the sunrise on New Year's Day 2020



Do you have an inspiring story or know a County employee who does?  
Email: [kgraff@marincounty.org](mailto:kgraff@marincounty.org)