

Boston Marathon was emotional one for Aurora runner

As one of the most storied athletic events in North America, the annual Boston Marathon has had its fair share of storylines over the years.

Just one year removed from the horrific bombings that killed three and injured over 200 others, longtime Aurora marathon runner Christine Gardner, 55, was determined to go back this year.

Gardner had run the annual Patriot's Day marathon numerous times before, but thankfully pulled out of last year's run just a week prior due to a calf muscle injury.

She remembers exactly what she was doing at the time she found out about the tragedy.

"I was actually on my way to teach an indoor cycling class at York Regional Police at 5 District in Markham when I heard the news," she recalled.

"I was so distraught that I could not focus very well as I taught the class. I was in total disbelief. All I could think about were all the people I knew that were there and I was so worried about them. I was just hoping that they were all safe.

"After the class, when I returned home and started watching the news I was overwhelmed with so much emotion."

Immediately she was determined to get better and qualify for 2014 to run in Boston for the seventh time to show solidarity with her fellow runners.

"Two weeks after the bombing I was bound and determined to somehow get to Boston this year, so I trained to run the Goodlife Fitness Toronto Marathon about two weeks after the bombing," she said. "I wasn't prepared for it, because I wasn't 100 per cent healed, but I wanted so badly to qualify again."

It was very painful for her, but she did qualify with a 3:53 time over the 42.2 km marathon.

"Even though I qualified, it didn't guarantee me a spot because there were so many people," she said. "They [Boston Marathon] opened up to a field of 36,000 people, but based on my age and timing I was able to make it in. When I got in I felt really grateful."

Simply put, running this year was something she said she will absolutely never forget.

She recalled being surrounded by thousands upon thousands of spectators and runners going around sharing stories, shaking hands and hugging prior to the race.

Memorials and tributes were everywhere, sometimes bringing tears to her eyes, thinking about what happened last year.

"The most emotional part was when we went the day of the marathon; we went to drop off our race kits [clothing bags] at the Boston Common and there were banners laid out on the grass and they were signed from different schools all over the world apparently and reading the notes, it brought tears to our eyes," she said. "It was so emotional.

"You just feel like you're running with your best friends and the amount of spectators that came out this year was truly overwhelming. You honestly could have high-fived for 26.2 miles to the finish line."

One thing she recalls seeing was people walking around with blue and yellow knitted scarves. The scarves came from all over the world "apparently 7,000 in total" and were handed out at one of the churches, each with its own story.

The runners also received a token from last year's race in the form of a bracelet cut from the many banners that ran along the

marathon route last year.

Full of emotions, Gardner ran a strong marathon alongside her peers and as she ran closer to the finish line, she said the feeling became overwhelming and images of 2013 went through her mind.

?People just wanted to high five and hug and say thank you so much for coming back. And the volunteers were amazing. It was just an incredible experience and I will never forget it. I'll never forget it.?

It was her 27th marathon and she finished with a time of 3:47, well under the 4:10 mark needed to be considered for next year. Her story even got her recognized during a town council meeting, when Aurora Councillor John Abel mentioned her successes.

As a personal trainer at Timberlane Athletic Club, Gardner figures to be ready for 2015.

?I'm looking forward to going back next year and I did qualify, so I'm hoping that I get in, and then I'm hoping to go to the 120th anniversary in 2016,? she said.