

[North](#)[South](#)[Washington](#)[Westmoreland](#)

One giant step for women

102 times up 36 flights at Cathedral sets record

Monday, December 14, 2009

By Paula Reed Ward, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette



Diana Marongiu-Lutz and her husband, Karl, after breaking the record for running the steps at the Cathedral of Learning.

Diana Marongiu-Lutz is an ultrarunner and a triathlete. In the spring, she and a friend started climbing the steps inside the University of Pittsburgh's Cathedral of Learning as crosstraining.

The first time, she went up the 36 flights three times.

Then she learned that the female record for the number of times up -- they don't walk back down, they take an elevator -- was just 24 trips.

So, in June, Ms. Marongiu-Lutz, of Natrona Heights, went up 40 times. And that's when she decided she wanted to break the male record -- 101 times set by cyclist Danny Chew in 2007.

"A friend of mine said, 'Diana, you're crazy. You can't break the male record.'

"That really got me. To hear a woman saying that, it really bothered me. She said 'You have to know your limitations.' "

Ms. Marongiu-Lutz, 44, trained over the summer and fall by biking, running, swimming and lifting weights. On Saturday morning, she set out to climb the steps 102 times.

It took her 23 hours and 34 minutes. Mr. Chew set the record in 17 hours.

"I just kept on going and going," she said. "I felt really good up until 65 times."

But around 80, she said, it started to go downhill. She became sleepy and nauseated.

"The last 10 times, it was really rough."

But, she continued, "I proved that a woman could do it."

While climbing the steps at the second tallest educational building in the world is hard, Ms. Marongiu-Lutz said it does not take more energy than ultrarunning.

"It's more difficult because it's mentally challenging because you're in the same stairwell the whole time," she said.

She took a few bathroom breaks and had snacks every time she reached the top deck. Her sustenance included water with sea salt, fruit, Jell-O, organic peanut butter and jelly and homemade energy bars.

Yesterday, she said she was only "a little bit" sore.

"I used all my back muscles and my glutes," she said.

Ms. Marongiu-Lutz invited Mr. Chew for her challenge, and he joined her for the first 62 times up the steps on Saturday. He stopped at that point but stayed at the Cathedral talking to her friend and her husband to watch her break his record.

"I was pretty impressed," Mr. Chew said. "She kept saying 'I'm just going to do one more, one more, one more.' And slowly, the numbers creeped up."

He was sad to see his record broken, he said, but happy for Ms. Marongiu-Lutz.

Since 1991, Mr. Chew said that he has set a number of records involving the Cathedral of Learning steps.

His fastest time going up all 36 flights is 3 minutes 38 seconds, set in 1993. He also has gone up the steps nine times in just one hour.

"I just can't do these records anymore," said Mr. Chew, 47, whose goal is to ride his bike 1 million miles.

He's now at 665,000.

Mr. Chew does, however, have an 18-year-old nephew who will be visiting over the holidays. Like his uncle, he is a long-distance cyclist.

"He may go for the 102 record."

Paula Reed Ward can be reached at pward@post-gazette.com or 412-263-2620.

Looking for more from the Post-Gazette? Join [PG+](#), our members-only web site. You'll get exclusive sports content, opinion, financial information, discounts from retailers and restaurants, and more. Our [introduction to PG+](#) gives you all the details.



First published on December 14, 2009 at 12:00 am