

marathon mission

steps for a cure

by Adrian Buckley

Pat Farmer, former ultra-marathoner and now Liberal Member for Macarthur in Sydney, is obviously one motivated guy. You have to be pretty motivated to contemplate running 100,000+ steps for over 24 hours up and down Centrepont Tower in Sydney, the equivalent of running to the peak of Mt Everest!

When you know a little about Pat's personal history, you get a clearer understanding of why events such as Steps Closer to a Cure for Ovarian Cancer are so important to him. Pat lost his wife suddenly when she was just 31, leaving him to raise his two young children as a single dad. Reflecting on how difficult it has been for his own children to grow up without their mum was all the motivation he needed to make the decision to push his body up the hot, airless stairwell of Centrepont Tower in an attempt to break his former world record of 101,934 stairs.

Pat's goal was to raise awareness of a cancer that over 1,000 women in Australia are diagnosed with each year. It is sobering to know that, of those women diagnosed, 75% will be in the advanced stages of the disease when diagnosed. This is because, unlike breast cancer, there are currently no early screening procedures for ovarian cancer. This dramatically affects survival rates. In fact, only 18% of women diagnosed with ovarian cancer live longer than five years. As Pat points out, he will only hurt for a short time after the climb, but what is important is to get the message out that more needs to be done to support research into ovarian cancer.

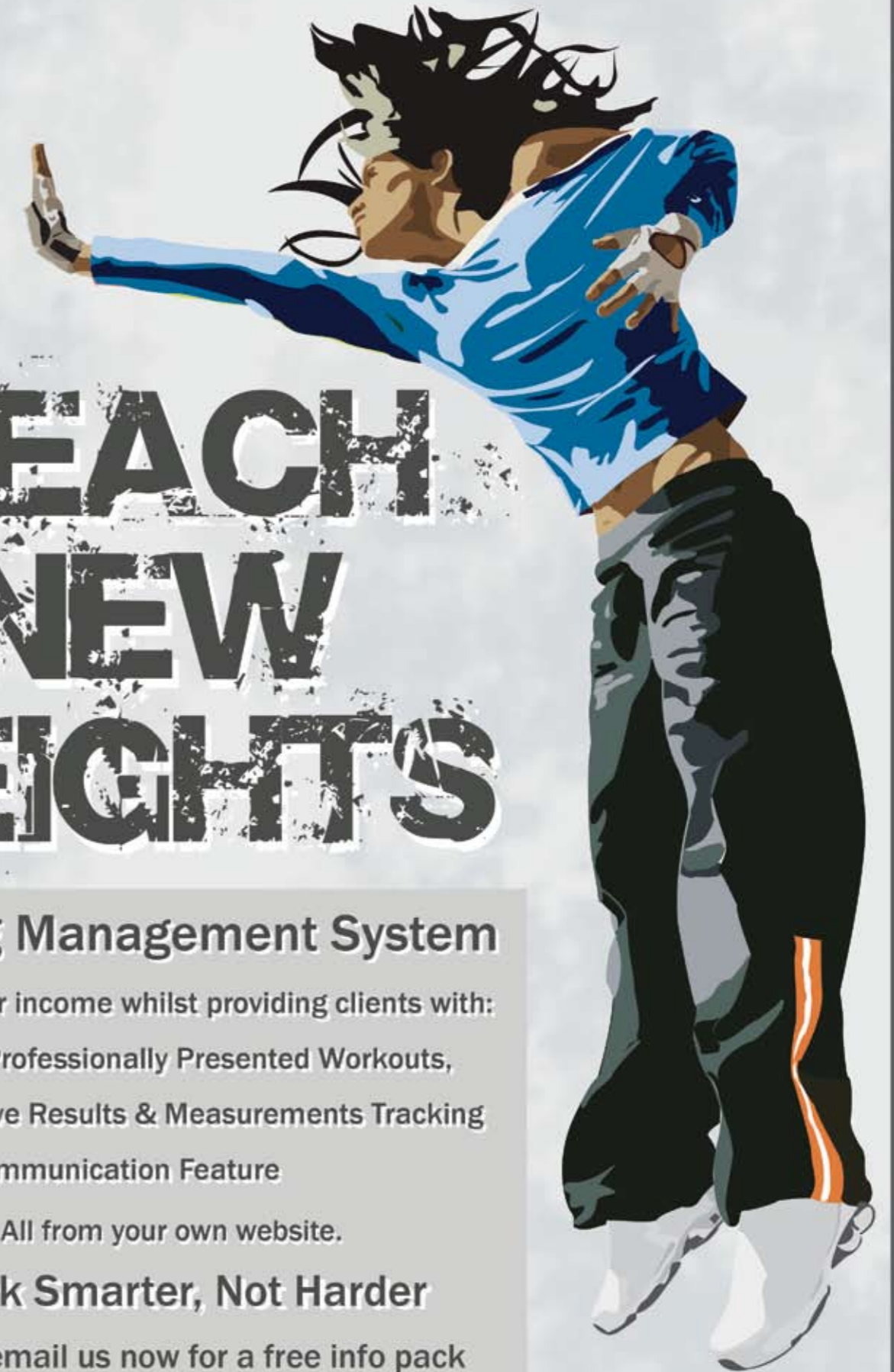
Although Pat has always been conscious of good health and fitness, it is difficult to maintain fitness in the demanding world of politics. He managed a rigorous training regime of three workouts per day to prepare his body for the rigours of stair-climbing, particularly the stress on his lower back, knees and abdominals. Using cross-training, including weights, cycling and running, he was able to get into peak shape to make the attempt, although he did say he was a little worried how his 43-year-old body was going to feel the following week!

On 14 December 2006, running on behalf of the Millennium Research Foundation, Pat and fellow ultra-fit politician Tony Abbott managed to run 91,207 steps and 85,667 steps respectively, an incredible effort. They stopped only for quick bites of banana, watermelon, chocolate, nuts and heaps of fluids (and a spot of KFC, which we were assured is not a regular ultra-marathon dietary staple). Pat did not reach his target number of steps, but the combined effort of both politicians still raised over \$400,000 and counting! These funds will go a long way in the search to find a cure for a cancer that takes an Australian woman every 10 hours.

The day provided a positive message about health and fitness - especially keeping in mind that both Pat and Tony are in their 40s - and reinforced how important it is for us to fund and support researchers, such as those with the Millennium Foundation, in their quest to find better treatments for women with ovarian cancer.



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