

Running 4 Deserts to Challenge Addiction

57-year-old Tackles Ultramarathon Fundraising With Ajilon's Online Help

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Linda Quirk

Linda Quirk is on a mission to become the first woman to complete the 4 Deserts series of ultramarathons in one year—and raise \$1 million as well as awareness to battle the problems of addiction at the same time. With the help of [Ajilon Consulting](#), Melville, N.Y., the 57-year-old Florida woman is also getting the word out online as she covers the globe on foot.

Quirk began the project in 2008 by running marathons on all seven continents to raise money for Caron Treatment Centers. The nonprofit provider of alcohol and drug addiction treatment

helped Quirk's stepdaughter in her recovery from methamphetamine addiction seven years ago.

Working with Quirk, Ajilon, a specialty IT consulting firm that's part of Adecco Group, set up a website, [Run7on7.com](#) and blog as well as a presence on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#). With Ajilon's help, Quirk has so far raised \$400,000 toward her \$1 million goal.

"Ajilon was the very first one to step up to help me with the beginnings, with my website," Quirk says. "I sat down and explained what my vision was. It was not as grand as they've helped me produce. They've been a tremendous support for me."

"At Ajilon Consulting, we were compelled by Linda's story and mission, and knew we could assist her in meeting her goal of not only running around the world but also raising funds for her cause," said Senior VP Matthew Ripaldi in a statement. "As an organization that empowers companies and individuals every day to realize the importance of technical skills and capabilities, we felt strongly that our IT and Web development expertise could only further empower her mission and get her closer to that fundraising finish line."

To continue to raise money toward her \$1 million goal, Quirk this year decided to attempt the 4 Deserts, running four 155-mile ultramarathons this year across Atacama in Chile in March, the Gobi in China at the end of this month, the Sahara in Egypt in October and the Antarctica deserts in November. She plans to keep her fans and donors engaged by blogging about each six-to-seven-day race as she runs it, as she did in Chile in March.

So far, Quirk says, the donation process has been slow. "It's really very difficult. We have the added stigma attached to us—addiction being the unacceptable disease," she says. "We lose more individuals, especially our youth today, to this disease. The old cloud that hangs over it is [the belief] that people choose this, and really you don't."

A key part of what she's doing is educating people about the problem of addiction to get them to start talking about it. "If you look at our youth, they can try a substance one time and become addicted. It's in high schools and even in middle schools. You do everything that's right for your kids, but there's peer pressure out there," Quirk says. "This happens to good families, good people, and [we need to] get them to start talking. That's a huge part of what I'm trying to do. Without talking, we won't be able to break these barriers down."

As part of her project, Quirk talks with people working at addiction treatment centers in countries where she runs to share information.

"We're trying to open those doors, show how this is a global problem," she says. "What we've been able to accomplish in this short period of time is huge."

She's also doing it with the support of her friends and family. Seven people are joining her in various desert runs, including her stepdaughter's fiancé, who plans to do the Gobi Desert race with her. Quirk says that she and her friends pay their own expenses so that all donations go to Caron Treatment Centers. She also donates to [carbonfund.org](#) to help offset the environmental effects of her traveling.

"I'm fascinated by the ultramarathon endeavors," she says. "I just love going to all these different countries and doing things out of the ordinary. When I saw the designation that no woman has done this in a year, I thought well heck, why not try? The motivation was to try something out of the ordinary. Now it's me and two others—one from England and a 25-year-old from Australia. Even if I don't cross a foot over the line before the other two, I'll be the oldest, regardless—no one's going to beat me on *that* one."

Once she hits the \$1 million mark, Quirk plans to expand her fundraising efforts to benefit other treatment centers and programs. One possibility is to create her own trail-running race.

In the meantime, she has \$600,000 and three more deserts to go, although the first one, Chile's Atacama, is considered to be the most difficult because it's said to be the driest deserts on Earth. "It was brutal," Quirk says. "The first one is always the worst because you have no idea what it is you're going to encounter out there. I've never seen sand dunes as high as these. I actually found myself laughing because it was incredible."