



OMAHA RUNNING CLUB NEWSLETTER

*For the members of the Omaha Running Club * Vol. 48* Fall 2019*

Marathon yields to Mother Nature

Tom Whitaker tried to be optimistic when he woke up long before sunrise that soggy Sept. 22 morning. The race director for the Heartland Marathon was hoping, just as those who registered for one of the three races, that the rains would at least ease up in time for the 7 o'clock start.

"Early on, it was raining, but it wasn't real heavy rain," Whitaker said. "It was fairly steady, but you could get around in it, you could do things, you could set up stuff. Everything was being done with the setup."

"It looked like it was going to be miserable but doable."

The event was delayed for a few minutes as officials waited for police notification that the road crossing was clear. The full marathon then started, followed about eight minutes later by the start of the half.

Nobody was prepared for — nor could they have predicted — what would happen just minutes after that.

"We got (the half) going," Whitaker said, "and all of a sudden, gale-forced winds came up, and the rain just pelted down like crazy. Tents were blowing away."

One of those tents covered the timing equipment.

"It had moved four or five feet, and several of us grabbed it," he said. "We were holding onto it to try to keep some cover over the timing equipment until they could snatch it up and get it put away."

The key items under that tent, the laptop that took the timing information and the printer used to publish results, got drenched, leaving them disabled for the race.



The Missouri River continued to rise during the Heartland Marathon, with water taking over part of the course.

Bart Yasso says stopping the race was right call. **Page 2.**

"At that point," Whitaker said, "there wouldn't be any results for the race."

Combining that with the sense that conditions weren't going to improve, the decision was made to pull the plug on the race. The race director feared for the safety of the runners and the volunteers stationed throughout the course.

"We decided just before the 10K was supposed to start that it was canceled," Whitaker said. "We got the gators out on

the course to tell people to get off the course as quickly as possible — and to relieve the volunteers."

The vast majority of the runners, he said, understood the decision to stop the race, but there were a few who felt otherwise.

"One gal in particular said, 'I did the Snowbunny Half Marathon in Montana, and that was a lot worse than this.' But most everybody sent understanding notes, and they perfectly understood that it was the right thing to do."

At that point, the rain had subsided a bit, but that didn't mean the potential danger

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Yasso agrees with decision to stop race

Bart Yasso was back in Omaha for a third straight year to compete in the Heartland Marathon. He surely didn't expect to get a taste of Nebraska's unpredictable weather, but that's just what he experienced.

Just as he did the previous two years, the former chief running officer for Runner's World magazine, entered the half marathon, which took off under the persistent rain that had begun hours earlier. About three miles into the race, he got the word that conditions were no longer safe for those on the course, and the race was stopped.

"I've been to races that have been canceled and postponed," Yasso said. "I've seen it all. But I'm telling you, it was the right call. That weather was brutal."

Yasso said the timing of the downturn of conditions couldn't have come at a worse time.



"I've seen it all. But I'm telling you, it was the right call. That weather was brutal."

— Bart Yasso

"I understand that if it had come in earlier, we could have delayed the race," he said. "When the half started, it wasn't that bad. But I swear, five minutes into the start, it got crazy."

"There was no way you could forecast that. It's one of those fronts that if you're two miles away it's a different world. But right along that river it was bad."

Yasso estimated he was around the 3-mile mark when he got the word the races were being stopped.

"The first thing in my mind was that it

was a really smart move," he said, "because someone was going to get hurt."

Both full and half runners did two loops of the course, and Yasso noted on the second pass, water was higher than before.

"That area where they built the temporary bridge, that was so flooded," he said. "Manhole covers popped up from the pressure. That's not good."

Yasso said he could tell the river was rising in such a short time.

"I'm telling you," he said, "that river was moving scary fast."

The visitor complimented marathon officials for stopping the race as quickly as they did. Despite the bad experience, he plans to return next year.

"It's that perfect race you like," he said. "A running race put on by runners."

Marathon: Some runners elected to keep moving forward

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to runners was gone, Whitaker said, not by any means.

"They were pumping out a section of the trail north of the Bob Kerrey Pedestrian Bridge toward Gallup because of the river level and the heavy rains that came down over night," he said, "and the trail was getting flooded like a foot deep in water."

Farther south, a manhole cover blew from the pressure of the water, intensifying the danger to runners.

"It just was no longer doable," he said.

Whitaker has been a longtime race participant in addition to his many years helping organize and manage races, but that Sunday morning's weather was a first for him.

"I've never been in a situation where a race was canceled," he said. "I've run races in the rain and races that just finished in the rain, but this is the worst I've ever experienced."

"We were just a few hours from being flooded out during the race last year."

— ORC president Tom Whitaker

He noted that some runners chose to keep running despite knowing the race had been canceled. Three women were spotted using the porta-potties located near the start/finish area 2½ hours after the race began. Stacy Centarri, Sheila Johnson and Amy Hough said they had finished 13 miles and were going to complete the remaining 13 miles as a training run for another marathon.

Centarri said they could tell the Missouri River water was rising while they were on the course.

"There's a section that we were running that was kind of flooded on the trail," she said. "When we came through (a second time), that would have been an injury waiting to happen if we would have con-

tinued."

A year ago, the marathon finished in the nick of time as the river crept up over the portion of the course that went near Harrah's Casino.

"We were just a few hours from being flooded out during the race last year," Whitaker said.

The cancelation of this year's event produced questions about possible refunds, but Whitaker said that just isn't possible. Those who registered for this year's event will, however, receive a 25 percent discount for 2020.

Despite the challenges caused by the high water, the marathon will return but with a possible change in course. Whitaker and his committee will look at several options.

"They're supposedly developing the Lewis & Clark Landing," he said, "and if that comes to pass we wouldn't be able to use that area anyway. But, yeah, we'll be back next year."

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President's Message

The Rime of the Ancient Race Director:

I am no poet, as I will shortly demonstrate, but as I stood on Lewis & Clark Landing Sept. 22 in the midst of the monsoon, I could not help but think of the Samuel Taylor Coleridge classic as water, water everywhere washed away the efforts of our volunteers and runners alike. I personally had hold of the corner of a tent and side curtain trying to help keep the tent in place long enough for the timing equipment to be rescued. Fortunately, although soaked, the equipment dried out without permanent damage.



Tom Whitaker

But as conditions continued to deteriorate, there was little left to do for the safety of everyone but to cancel and try to get everyone — volunteers and runners alike — to safety as soon as possible. As for my poetic efforts? Well, here goes:

Water, water everywhere, and gale force winds as well;

And a raging river rolling by, continuing to swell;

We thought we would be racing;

But the storm we were facing;

Just shot our plans to

OK, back to the task at hand. Even though Heartland became Floodland this year, a lot of credit is due a lot of people for trying so very hard to complete the job. I will begin with what I consider the most important

factor and express deep appreciation and gratitude for our tremendous volunteers who put in untold effort ahead of time and, especially on race day, stood their ground and did their best to provide support. We received many compliments from our participants on the enthusiasm and support everyone provided.

Our special guest, Runner's World's Bart Yasso, who has been to just about every race there is all over the world, was very impressed with volunteer support.

I am deeply grateful for all the hard work and dedication everyone so freely gave to the cause. We continually stress the importance of volunteers and cannot say enough about the support everyone provided this year. Thank you one and all. You have elevated our reputation to a level that will surely help our local event grow and prosper in the future.

A special thank you must also go to our Race Committee for the leadership and just

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Volunteers clean up the start/finish area of the Heartland Marathon, which was halted moments before the 10K was to start. A strong wind gust carried tents away.

Safety of runners, volunteers top priority

By John Fey

There was a commercial that aired on TV in 1977 that somehow popped into my head while driving home after the cancellation of the Heartland Marathon. The ad was for Chiffon margarine and featured Mother Nature. She was asked to taste the margarine.



"Oh, come on," she said. "That's a stick of my sweet, creamy butter."

Told that it was Chiffon's stick margarine, Mother Nature replied: "Chiffon's stick margarine?"

The announcer: "Right, Chiffon fooled you."

Mother Nature: "It's not nice to fool Mother Nature."

Then came a clap of thunder.

Apparently, the Omaha Running Club has upset Mother Nature to the point where she's put a curse on the Heartland Marathon. It started with the inaugural event five years ago when unseasonable heat cooked those who participated in the full marathon, the half-marathon or the 10K.

The new course that followed a year later took runners on both sides of the Missouri River, which we all know has been running high pretty much ever since

2011, when it hit record levels.

The issue, more than once, was on the Iowa side, specifically, the part of the course that runs past Harrah's Casino. It has caused late course adjustments to avoid running in ankle-high water — or worse.

But none of the past Heartland Marathons can compare to what happened last month. Volunteers were in place around the 26.2-mile course well before the 7 a.m. start. Rain was falling, but there was no lightning nearby that would have caused a delay.

Yes, the Missouri was running quite high, but race officials felt the course was in good enough shape to send runners out. And, after a short delay to make sure the police were in place, the gun sounded.

Just before the 10K was to begin, a monster wind gust sent tents flying, including the one that protected the computer tied to the timing devices.

"My laptop got drenched," race timer Alan Higley told me later.

I arrived two and a half hours after the start of the race, hoping to see the male and female marathon winners. What I witnessed when I pulled into the parking lot was volunteers packing up the start/finish area.

By then, the rain had stopped, but there was a lot of standing water. Had the race continued, results would have been impossible to compile with the timing equipment disabled.

But that's not the sole reason club president and race director Tom Whitaker put out the word that the race was cancelled.

There was a serious concern about the safety of those on the course — both runners and volunteers. The river continued to rise, meaning parts of the course were now under water.

Stopping the race was clearly the right call. The last thing race officials wanted to see was someone getting injured because of the conditions.

I've spoken at the ORC's distance running clinics a few times, and I always bring up in my remarks that there are two things a runner has no control of when waking up on race day: 1) how you'll feel and 2) what the weather will be.

I speak from personal experience. During my racing career, I've run in the cold, the heat and, of course, the rain. And there were some races where I was, shall we say, a little foggy from too much imbibing the night before.

And I've worked the finish line at my fair share of races in all kinds of conditions, from too hot, too cold and, of course, too wet. Most recently was a 5K at Elmwood Park, where it rained right up to the start time. The right decision was made to cancel that event with the Elmwood trail a sloppy mess.

So the question that we have to ask heading into the 2020 Heartland Marathon is: OK, Mother Nature, what do you have in store next September?

Message: Planning for 2020 Heartland Marathon started

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plain hard work that went into preparing for our event. Disappointment abounded due to the outcome, but none more than among Race Committee members who understand the tremendous effort run-

ners committed to running our event, especially those from 31 states who came to Omaha to support us.

At this point we can only put this year's experience behind us and look to the future. We are already at work planning next year's races with a date of Sept. 27,

2020. Stay tuned for further details.

In the meantime, registration is open for our Halloween themed The Bones Run at Standing Bear Lake on Oct. 25 at 7 p.m. This is always a fun event followed by a great after-party and awards ceremony. Sign up today!

Labor Day Go Girl 5K raises big bucks



Kami and Maria Alessandro accept their flowers from Tom Whitaker for finishing first in the mother/daughter competition.



Whitaker presents a rose to overall winner, Sarah Neubert, whose time was 21:48.



The winning sister team: Daphne and Phoebe Schroen.

The 22nd annual Go Girl 5k is in the books, and it was another great success. Sixteen mother/daughter teams and four sister teams registered this year. It was so exciting to see six of our mother/daughter teams were from Fit Girl (one of our beneficiaries). New this year, participants got the chance to vote on this year's race shirt, and the teal shirt was a resounding winner.

The race and raffle raised nearly \$3,000 to be distributed between the Hope Center for Kids and Fit Girl, Inc.

Following the 5k and kids runs, participants enjoyed all you can eat pancakes and an overwhelming number of items to select from in the fundraising raffle.

Congrats to all of this year's runners. We look forward to seeing all of you again next year. View photos and results on the results tab at www.gogirlrun.weebly.com. We can't wait to see you next year.

— Jeremy Kaliff



A happy runner finishes the kids' run.



And they're off! The Go Girl Run had 127 finishers.



Members of Step into Running prepare for the start of the race. (Photos by Jeremy Kaliff and Joe Drugmand.)

More photos from the Go Girl 5K on Page 6.

More pictures from Sept. 2 Go Girl Run



Fit Girl mother/daughter runners.



Sarah Neubert of Omaha comes in first in 21:48.



Volunteer Jose Badillo helps direct parking.



Kami Alessandra of Omaha places second, just five seconds behind the winner.



**Left photo:
Race director
Jeremy Kaliff
gives pre-race
instructions.**

**Right photo:
Zia Gage, left,
and her
mother,
Sharon, finish
the mother-
daughter race.**



Photos by Jeremy Kaliff and Joe Drugmand.

The Bones Run 5K kicks off Halloween

What better way than to get into the Halloween spirit than participate in the ORC's The Bones Run 5K? This popular event takes place Friday, Oct. 25, at Standing Bear Lake, starting at 7 p.m.

This ORC-managed race is also a Run the Magnet event. The after-party at Legends Patio & Grill Bar is a must-attend part of the evening, featuring appetizers and a refreshment coupon for each participant.

Due to space limitations, the event is limited to 250 participants. Registration fee is \$30 through Oct. 25, so sign up today by going to omaharun.org/race-calendar. Did we mention your entry fee gets you a cool T-shirt?

ORC offers two more fun runs to round out 2019

If you missed the Oct. 9 ORC Octoberfest Fun Run, don't fret. You have two more chances before the year is over.

Before you chow down on your Thanksgiving feast, you can start the day with the ORC Thanksgiving Fun Run at Lake Zorinsky. The run/walk starts at 9 a.m. at the park's boat ramp, 3808 S. 156th St.

The final event comes Dec. 8 with the ORC Holiday Lights Fun Run. The 4-mile run starts at 6 p.m., with runners meeting



The ORC's Bones Run takes place Oct. 25 at Standing Bear Lake.

at 10th and Harney in downtown Omaha. Hot chocolate and cookies will be served following the run.

Don't forget, these fun runs are free to our members. Thanks to Daren Konda for putting them together — and to our volunteers for helping out.

Beer & Bagel Run returns to Quarry Oaks Nov. 9-10

One of the longest-running, not to mention popular, events in the Omaha area is the Peak Performance Beer & Bagel Run. It now offers runners the option to navigate the Quarry Oaks course on back-to-back days.

Saturday, Nov. 9, is the half-ish, where runners traverse the course twice. For the less adventurous, the Sunday race is one loop of the cross-country course, called 4-ish in length.

Both races begin at 9 a.m. To register, go to beerandbagel.com/bbnebraska.

Get 2020 off and running with the Chiller Challenge

The calendar might say October, but it's not too early to begin thinking about plans for 2020. For you runners and walkers, the ORC offers the annual Chiller Challenge, set for Feb. 2, which happens to be Super Bowl Sunday.

Due to continued Missouri River flooding, NP Dodge Park has closed, and the Chiller Challenge won't return there in 2020. Stay tuned for a new event location and complete information on the ORC website. And monitor the ORC Facebook page, too.

Upcoming Area Race Dates (For Complete Details, Go to omaharun.org)

OCTOBER

- 19 — Neb. Furniture Mart Halloween 5K Walk/Run (RTM)
- 19 — Halloween Costume Run
- 19 — Crime Stoppers Cops & Robbers 5K
- 19 — Sumtur Twilight Dash 10K and 5K (RTM)
- 20 — Turning Laps to Breathe 5K
- *25 — ORC The Bones Run 5K (RTM)

NOVEMBER

- 2 — Hoofing it for Heroes Stick Horse 5K Run/Walk
- 3 — Good Life Halfsy
- 6 — Ladies of the Evening Group Run
- 9 — Peak Performance Beer & Bagel Half-ish (RM)
- 10 — Peak Performance Beer & Bagel 4-ish (RTM)
- 28 — Feast and Feathers Trail Races (13.1/10K/5K) (RTM)

- *28 — ORC Thanksgiving Fun Run

DECEMBER

- 4 — Ladies of the Evening Group Run
- 7 — Siena/Francis House 5K Walk or Run
- *8 — ORC Holiday Lights Fun Run
- 14 — Arthritis Foundation Nebraska Jingle Bell Run
- 15 — Candy Cane Run (10K, 5K)

JANUARY

- 5 — Rust Buster 5K
- 6 — 4th Annual Move It or Lose It 5K
- 19 — Full Wolf Moon 5K

* Indicates ORC-sponsored event. (RTM) indicates Run the Magnet event.

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