



OMAHA RUNNING CLUB NEWSLETTER

*For the members of the Omaha Running Club * Vol. 49* Summer 2020*

Marathon's newest foe: COVID-19

Welcome to the new "normal" world of running in 2020. That's the message — for now, at least — that is being delivered by organizers of the Heartland Marathon, which they hope will be allowed to go off Sept. 27, with a 7 a.m. start. As with previous years, the full marathon also features half and 10K races.

The ORC's Heartland Marathon page (heartlandmarathon.org) posted this as of July 1:

"We are moving forward with the plan to hold the Heartland Marathon, Marathon Relay, Half Marathon, and 10K on September 27. Details for race weekend such as courses will be disclosed later on the Heartland website. We are reopening registration and will maintain spring pricing for all events until July 15. Prices are currently expected to increase beyond that point."

"If, by July 15, it becomes apparent due to a significant increase in coronavirus infections, because government and/or health officials deem it necessary to impose restrictions, or because of a lack of volunteers or other resources that make it impossible to responsibly hold a race, in light of the COVID-19 pandemic we will refund entry fees paid prior to July 15. Processing fees will not be refunded. If we are still able to move forward on July 15, there will be no refunds, as we will begin ordering and paying for items for the race."

"We will continue to carefully monitor the COVID-19 pandemic and do everything possible to ensure our events are held in a safe manner. We will follow all national, state, and local government and health department guidelines, so



The 2018 Heartland Marathon was blessed by ideal weather, but the high Missouri River caused concern for race organizers. (Photo by Justin Barnes.)

that runners, volunteers, vendors, spectators and others can participate with a feeling of confidence."

The coronavirus adds to list of woes that the marathon has had to endure since the inaugural event was cursed by unseasonably warm weather and a course change that had to be made shortly before race day. Last year was especially heartbreaking for organizers and participants when a fast-moving storm forced cancellation of the marathon just as the 10K was about to start. Full and half-marathon runners were on the course at the time.

Race director and ORC president Tom Whitaker and his committee have spent the past few months working with local health officials on going forward with the marathon. Asked near the end of June what he thought the odds were for the event going off, Whitaker said 50-50.

"The next two weeks hopefully will permit a sound decision in the interests of everyone," he said. "With the big events going virtual, my confidence fades daily."

The race committee continues to seek

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Boston cancellation a bummer for many

Was it really seven years ago that tragedy struck near the finish line of the Boston Marathon? April 15, 2013, was one of those horrific dates etched in the minds of Americans — especially those from Omaha who were participants on that fateful Monday morning.

Now comes a new reality: cancellation of the oldest and most prestigious marathon in America, if not the entire world. After the coronavirus hit the U.S. with a vengeance in mid-March, Boston Marathon officials first postponed the April 20 race for five months before canceling it on May 28.

Those who registered had the option of running a “virtual” marathon, which would earn them a finisher’s medal or take a refund of their entry fee. The marathon annually brings together more than 30,000 runners of all ages.

News of the cancellation hit home with several ORC members who ran Boston. Mariana Phipps, a veteran of the marathon, said her heart aches for those who registered for this year’s event but wouldn’t be there.

“I have sympathy for anyone who I know



It was a chaotic scene in 2013 when two bombs exploded close to the finish line of the Boston Marathon.

worked hard, sometimes for years, to qualify for Boston,” she said. “The Boston Marathon is more than a race. It is a total ultimate experience for most runners. I know it was for me for seven consecutive years.

“From the expo, (where you can buy that extra special shirt that only can be found at the Boston Marathon expo); to the carbo-loading dinner, mingling with other excited runners and their families;

to the early morning bus ride to Hopkinton from the Commons; to the running in your wave past tens of thousand of spectators (some of them calling your name printed on your race bib); to the last few turns to that precious finish line; to the exhilaration of raising your arms in glory and relief as you cross that line to the awards banquet.

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Marathon: How to keep volunteers safe is next challenge

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advice and rulings from local health officials.

“We held a phone discussion with Douglas County Health Commissioner Andy Wessel with respect to how to put on events and meet state, city and Health Department requirements,” Whitaker said. “Although phasing guidelines are in place, health officials need support understanding how running events work and how guidelines can be applied successfully to such events.”

The Club president, like other avid runners, senses ORC members are eager to get back into the racing scene. Most events, including those on the 2020 Run the Magnet series, were canceled due to

the virus that made its impact known in mid-March.

Said Whitaker: “I have fielded questions from seasoned runners regarding when we were going to start putting on races again. There seems to be demand out there.”

Should the marathon, indeed, be allowed to go on, another strong volunteer turnout will be a must if the event is to succeed, Whitaker noted.

“Volunteers will be important,” he said, “but even more critical is determining how to use them and keep them safe. Due to fears of exposure, we may have trouble attracting them. All this is uncharted territory.”

While the past few years of high Mis-

souri River levels have caused headaches for Whitaker and his committee, this is another gut-puncher altogether.

“We certainly have faced challenges with Heartland,” he said. “It is a testament to the talent we have available to us that we have met all those difficulties and been able to put on an event or offer an alternative as we did last year with a last-minute virtual event. Virtuals were brand new at that time. Even more amazing is that the overwhelming majority of last year’s runners understood the action we took on the fly and agreed with it.”

With that in mind, Whitaker urges everyone to stay connected on the Club’s Facebook page and at heartlandmarathon.org for the latest information.

Boston: Ritland remembers 2014 Boston as quite special

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“Add to that drinking a few Sam Adams beers with the thousands of other runners, both amateurs and professional to be able to cherish the memories of all of those moments for the rest of your life. All of these things are what make the Boston Marathon so very special.”

Phipps acknowledged that the event’s organizers had a difficult decision to make regarding those who registered.

“I understand that the Boston Athletic Association is attempting to accommodate the runners who qualified for this year’s race, while accepting those runners who make the time cut-off this year,” she said. “The BAA has faced this problem before and expanded the participant numbers after the bombing in 2013 and for the 100th Anniversary in 1996. I would like to wish all the runners of the 2021 Boston Marathon good luck!”

Derek Fey finished 77th overall at the 2009 Boston Marathon. Now the head cross country coach at College of Saint Mary, he feels deeply for those who will have to wait another year for the “real” marathon.

“There really is nothing quite like Boston,” he said. “The final turn onto Boylston Street is one of the most satisfying ends to any marathon. My favorite memory was passing through the scream tunnel at the half marathon. Hundreds of students from Wellesley College were yelling, and you can hear them at mile 12. I hope those who qualified will get to experience the Boston Marathon at some point.”

Club member Rick Hrabchak was looking forward to his 20th consecutive Boston Marathon. Like others, he was sad that it wouldn’t happen.

“Having an objective for winter training and workouts keeps me active and focused,” he said. “All of the memories are favorites, from the expo, to Hopkinton, to the excited running colleagues, to the 26 miles of supportive and boisterous crowds, to the finish line. I’m disappointed to be missing the live event this



year but will certainly participate in the virtual run.”

John Ritland, another ORC member who has lots of Boston Marathon experience, had uncertainty heading into 2020 even before the virus struck. He shared his thoughts in a recent email.

“I signed up for Boston 2020 knowing with some certainty that I would not be able to run it, as I was slated for knee replacement surgery around the first of the year,” he said. “I planned on going anyway and enjoying the race as a spectator for the first time and to cheer on friends.

“I’d run it eight times before, so not running it this last time would be OK. But my wife kept asking me, ‘Why did you sign up if you knew you were not going to run it?’ Now, with 2020 canceled and the offer to use our qualifying times for 2021, I’m looking like a wise old sage, or maybe just a fortuitous fool. I will register for April 2021 and, hopefully, be able to jog and walk through it. That’s my plan.”

Ritland said his favorite Boston memory resulted from the 2014 event. It was the first anniversary of the bombing.

“Runners from all over the world reclaimed the marathon and Patriots’ Day following the tragedies of the previous year,” he said. “It was such an emotional

ORC member John Ritland (showing off his 2019 medal) was hoping to compete in his ninth Boston Marathon, but he felt his surgically repaired knee wasn’t going to be ready for the 2020 event. Though his wife wondered why he even signed up, it turned out his qualifying time would carry over to 2021. “I’m looking like a wise old sage, or maybe just a fortuitous fool,” he said. “I will register for April 2021 and, hopefully, be able to jog and walk through it. That’s my plan.”

day, with many of us fighting to hold back the tears all the way from Hopkinton to the Copley Square finish line.”

More extra-special Boston Marathons are etched into Ritland’s memory.

“In the Newton Hills, I found myself running alongside Team Hoyt — the father/son team of Dick and Rick Hoyt,” he said. “Dick pushed his son Rick, who was born with cerebral palsy, in a wheelchair. Dick had planned on 2013 being their last year together, but they were stopped within one mile from the finish line by the bombings. So 2014 was their final year completing the Boston Marathon together. It was a thrill and an honor to run alongside them in their 32nd and final Boston.”

Ritland couldn’t help but feel emotionally charged when he hit the finish line — especially after what happened there.

“There were three young men hanging on the fence offering beers to the finishers. I accepted of course, and they screamed at me, ‘You are what makes this Marathon great!’ But it wasn’t me. I was just a 4-hour finisher from wave 3. That heart-felt proclamation from them was an expression of how much the Marathon means to the city of Boston — not just the runners. It’s the heart and soul of that town. And 2014 was all about remembering the victims of 2013 and taking back the day.”

ORC member Gallagher ran with best

Kevin Gallagher is a Nebraska native, but he was living in San Francisco in 1978 when he purchased his first pair of running shoes — New Balance 320's. It became the start of 42 years of running the streets and trails of California and Nebraska. Heading into the summer of 2020, he had logged more than 34,000 miles and completed 302 races.

Talk about starting a running career in a picturesque setting.

"In the beginning," Gallagher said, "we lived a few blocks from Golden Gate Park, and it was the perfect place to train and race. The park had both trail and street courses that included a great 5K/10K course with gentle rolling hills. I was able during those years to run San Francisco's Bay to Breaker (in 53:56) with what seemed like the entire world on the course. I ran in races with Bill Rodgers, Craig Virgin, Frank Shorter, Jim Fixx and a host of local runners including the legendary Walt Stack and Sister Marion Irvine."

A Kearney State College graduate, he moved to Omaha in the fall of 1981, the inaugural year of the Corporate Cup Run. He missed that one, but then completed the next 19 before meniscus surgery ended his streak. Injuries then kept him from training for 10K races.

Gallagher's first Omaha race took place on Thanksgiving Day 1981, a 5-miler that was victimized by heavy, wet snow. He placed 15th in a field of 200 and was timed in 34:53.

"Over the years — and particularly the 80's and 90's — I would start my season with the Lincoln Statehood 10-mile run and finish with the Richfield 10-mile run," he said. "Most of my races were around the Omaha area but I managed to get out to Kearney and Grand Island for a few runs. I was never motivated (lazy) to attempt a marathon, but did run half marathons in Lincoln and Omaha."

At the height of his running days, Gallagher became aware of the top runners and races in the area and, specifically,



Kevin Gallagher became familiar with Omaha's top runners.

runners close to his age. Here's what he had to say about them and those events:

"Gary Julin was clearly the best runner in my age group and was well respected as a fierce competitor. I can only remember finishing in front of him once — I don't remember how — but I have the results to prove it."

"There was a Labor Day 10K that went from just north of Omaha South High and finished at Lake Manawa. I always liked point-to-point racing. I recall once Tim Dooling arrived as the race was just underway and he was frantically taking off his jeans. Of course, he won."

"My best 10-miler was at Richfield, and I ran with Bill Monahan, another local runner who was older than me and better than me. We ran together, and I'm not quite sure who finished first between us, but I ran a 1:02:34."

"My 1997 half marathon in Lincoln was great. The weather was perfect early, and I ran 1:26:36 at age 50."

"I ran more than 15 Ralston Fourth of July runs that traditionally included some pretty quick runners. Weather was always a factor as were the hills."

"I won my first race in 1986 at Standing Bear Lake, a 5-miler, where I edged out John Peterson and Lou Soukup."

"I finished second at a 5K Park Ranger Run that went from Hanscom Park to

42nd Street. It was memorable because I ran a guy down in the last 800 meters to finish second and brought home a large trophy."

Gallagher worked at Mutual of Omaha and participated in numerous health fair runs. That's when he became acquainted with current ORC Hall of Famer Dick Burrows. The two often ran together on the final hill.

He also has to his credit two Bolder Boulder runs. In 1990, he placed 545th out of 23,450.

Gallagher's favorite races (in no particular order):

» Ralston Fourth of July. "A race without a stated distance, 2.95 or 2.83 or? Ran it a lot. We met at the Village Bar after the race. Good times."

» Corporate Cup. "Largest in-state race with best runners. Ran mostly for Mutual, which had its share of fast runners. I was always looking for someone to go sub-30 minutes in that race."

» Kearney. "Almost any race in my hometown as it brought back childhood memories. I ran my best 5-miler (28:36) at the Kearney Lakeview run and won the Nebraska Senior 5K one year."

» Bolder Boulder (twice) and Bay to Breakers (once). "They were just plain fun."

» Original YMCA Masters 8K at Boys Town. "The weather was almost always an issue."

» Wednesday night 5Ks in Golden Gate Park. "It was early in my running days, and they gave away great shirts and glasses."

With his running days in the rearview mirror, Gallagher said he's still able to squeeze out 10 to 15 miles a week and compete in an occasional shorter race. He has coaxed his two 10-year-old granddaughters to get into the sport.

"They are my running future, and my memories are my running past," he said. "See you on the road!"

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omaharun.org

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President's Message

I sincerely hope everyone is staying safe out there while at the same time finding ways to pursue our sport of running. These are strange times as we see most every day another major — and many smaller — events canceled or changed to virtual events.

Boston canceled, Berlin canceled, Twin Cities canceled, New York City canceled, Chicago probably next? Even the weather seems off key this year, as we experienced August temperatures and humidity in early June. The ORC is trying to plan events in the face of uncertainty as to how to go about doing so safely for runners, volunteers and spectators alike. The worst part: not knowing what to do to make it work.

I have noted an increase in activity at Lake Zorinsky. There are many more runners, bikers and walkers taking advantage of the opportunity to get outdoors and experience nature. They say everything has a silver lining, so in spite of the devastating impact COVID-19 is having on society, getting more people to include healthy activities in their lives is certainly one of the few pluses in all of this.

The ORC is planning to put on scheduled fall races based on what we know at this time. That may all change, of course, as we see how COVID-19 progresses. At this writing, we will hold Lake Wehrspann on Aug. 2 as planned as well as Peak to Peak Sept. 5 and Go Girl Run Sept. 7.

Heartland is still scheduled, and we will make a final decision in July based on the best information available at that time. The events will be different from the past as we create wave starts to observe social distancing,

eliminate open cups at aid stations and discourage congregating at the end of the race, just to name a few of the changes necessary to ensure everyone's safety. We look

forward to welcoming as many of you as possible to participate and support your club.

In spite of all the uncertainty, running is still running and fortunately can be done even during the pandemic we are now experiencing. I am reminded of the quote from John Bingham, better known as The Penguin, who had a very popular series of humorous, interesting and motivational articles in Runner's World magazine several years ago:

“If you run, you are a runner. It doesn't matter how fast or how far. It doesn't matter if today is your first day or if you've been running for twenty years. There is no test to pass, no license to earn, no membership card to get. You just run.”

So, go for a run. You'll feel better about yourself and life in general. And plan to come out for our events. We will do everything possible to keep you safe while providing an opportunity to keep the competitive fires burning.

“If you run, you are a runner. It doesn't matter how fast or how far. It doesn't matter if today is your first day or if you've been running for twenty years.”

“If you run, you are a runner. It doesn't matter how fast or how far. It doesn't matter if today is your first day or if you've been running for twenty years.”

John “The Penguin” Bingham



Tom Whitaker

Stay up to date by following the ORC on Facebook or go to
omaharun.org.

Pandemic turns us virtually upside down

By John Fey

So, where did we leave off in this space? That's right, it was the start of the pandemic that left us all wondering what happens next. After more than three months, we don't really know a whole lot more than we did before.

On top of that, at least when it comes to area running events, it's hard to know the future since things seem to be changing on nearly a daily basis. At the beginning of the year, everything seemed normal. Who could have predicted that the Feb. 2 Chiller Challenge would be one of the last events to be staged before the coronavirus crept into our lives?

Reality hit hard when college and professional spring sports came to a screeching halt. Before you knew it, just about everything was on hold, including road races. The stunner was the initial announcement that the Boston Marathon was going to be postponed until September, then got canceled and turned into a virtual race.

A virtual race? I had never heard of that, and it's likely that neither had many others. When I learned the details, I thought, "Talk about using the honor system." I guess it's better than nothing, but to me a virtual event doesn't quite have the same charm of a normal road race. I'm guessing I'm not alone in hoping this will be a temporary way of life.

Boston Marathon officials did offer refunds to those who didn't want to go the virtual route, and those who were registered can try again in 2021. Still, you've got to feel for those who were looking forward to this year's event.

One of the early casualties of the Run the Magnet series was the Peak Performance Blarney Stone 5K scheduled for St. Patrick's Day. It was postponed to June 20, but even that date was iffy at best. Race



The Peak Performance Blarney Stone 5K was set to take place March 17 but was postponed to June 20. It was the first Peak-managed race held under the city's social distancing rules. Race director Mike Ewoldt, left, sends out one of the waves of five to seven runners.

director Mike Ewoldt met with Omaha health department officials and was given the green light to hold the Blarney — with some restrictions, however.

Around 70 who registered went off in waves of five to seven people, separated by marked spots 6 feet apart. Yep, there was your social distancing in action. So how do you determine a winner? The app on Ewoldt's tablet was able to show and sort the finishing times of each runner. It also was able to separate by age group.

Curious, I asked a couple of the faster runners what they thought of the event. One reply was that while he really didn't know how fast those ahead were going, he didn't have to worry about trying to catch up — just run his regular pace and let the timing device declare the order of finish.

Sounds better than a "virtual" race, huh?

One of the stipulations outlined by the city was the elimination of the traditional

post-race party. Runners were allowed to pick up bagels and refreshments but told they had to return to their vehicles. Again, welcome to the new "normal."

As the weeks go by, we may get a better idea of where we're heading with this (at least I sure hope so), but in the meantime, I like the advice in Club president Tom Whitaker's message in this newsletter. Get out for a run or walk and enjoy Mother Nature. It's a great way to push this pandemic news off to the side and gain some healthy benefits from exercise.

With so much fear out there — especially among those of us in the "at-risk" category due to advanced age and/or underlying health issues — we need to do all we can to keep that anxiety to a minimum. For me, my daily walk not only clears my head but makes me feel, well, better.

So hang in there, everybody, keep moving and pray for a quick end to this pandemic so we can return to the "real" normal.

Step Into Running still going strong



The coronavirus failed to bring the popular Step Into Running program to a halt, although coordinator Jeremy Kaliff reports that some modifications have been made. “We held a virtual orientation on June 9 and in an effort to socially distance and keep people as safe as possible we capped the size to 20 participants,” she said. “Rather than meeting weekly for

group runs we meet every other week for them. On the weeks where we don't meet to run together we hold a virtual session with guest speakers who cover things like cross training, nutrition and other topics important to runners.”

Kaliff said the program is as important as ever during these challenging times in

which we all live.

“Although we have had to make modifications to the program due to Covid-19 we are extremely happy that we were able to make those modifications so that we did not have to cancel this year's program,” she said.

(Above photo supplied by Jeremy Kaliff.)

Go Girl 5k Run

The 23rd annual **Go Girl 5k Run/Walk** and kids fun run will be held at 8 a.m., Monday, Sept. 7, 2020. This 5K is to encourage and motivate women and girls to maintain a healthy, active lifestyle through running. Girls who stay active are more likely to develop positive coping skills, increased self worth and increased confidence.

Enjoy a run with a supportive atmosphere, followed by a **raffle** and **pancake breakfast** (tentative).

Age group awards will be presented. Registration is open now.

Visit www.gogirlrun.weebly.com for complete details and



registration.

Proceeds from this even benefit Fit Girl, Inc.

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