



OMAHA RUNNING CLUB NEWSLETTER

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

Virus, weather can't stop marathon

Tom Whitaker must have felt like Bill Murray in the movie "Groundhog Day" the morning of the Heartland Marathon. Just as he did a year ago, the Omaha Running Club president and marathon race director woke up early to learn rain was coming and could threaten the race.

"I woke up at 3:30 this morning having seen there was a chance for some precipitation," Whitaker said. "I wondered, 'Oh, boy, are we going to get hit again?' It didn't look that bad. There was lightning when we got here, and we had to delay for a while. But we got it off."

The 2019 event was canceled not long after the starting gun sounded due to a sudden storm. One year later, with lightning and thunder greeting runners at the start/finish line, the marathon was delayed about 20 minutes. There was concern on the minds of race organizers that a repeat of a year earlier would happen.

Even without weather issues, there was the threat of the race being shut down by the COVID-19 pandemic. But once the event was green-lighted, the nearly 350 participants in the full marathon, half, 10K and marathon relay toured the course in cool, but rain-free conditions.

Whitaker and others on the race committee spent countless hours working with city health officials to get the stamp of approval. It wasn't an easy process.

"It was very difficult to know for sure whether we were going to be able to do this or not with the pandemic," he said. "It became evident about a month ago or six weeks ago that perhaps we could, so we got busy ordering stuff and getting



After a brief delay caused by lightning in the area, the 2020 Heartland Marathon takes off. Tim Langdon, No. 77, got off to a fast start and was the overall winner in just under 3 hours. (Photo by Justin Barnes.)

Tim Langdon wins the Heartland Marathon a week after running another marathon. Page 3.

the word out that we were going to do it."

But even while that preparation was taking place, Whitaker and his team had concerns that the green light would turn red just weeks before the event.

"Right up into August," he said. "We really wondered with everything being canceled like the Boston Marathon, which was delayed and then changed to virtual."

Daren Konda, ORC's vice president and one of the race committee members, said COVID-19 just added to the headaches of

putting on a massive event like a marathon. He was asked what the top hurdle they faced.

"Definitely working with Douglas County, working with the City of Omaha, working with the City of Council Bluffs to be able to determine what was appropriate for us to meet all the health directive measures that were in place," Konda said, "especially during the planning stages when we were two or three months out and not knowing exactly what could happen or what the conditions would be."

He continued: "Those decisions affected when to order stuff, how much to order and all of the costs associated with it. It

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Heartland winner hails volunteer effort

Tim Langdon was determined not to let the threat of stormy weather keep him from running the Sept. 27 Heartland Marathon. The Bennington resident — and one of the area's top runners — “warmed up” for it by running the Omaha Marathon a week earlier.

“One road marathon a year is usually enough,” Langdon said moments after winning the Club's signature race, “but this year with everything being so crazy I thought I might as well do some different things and have some fun. I wanted to do back-to-back (marathons) and see what would happen.”



Tim Langdon

What happened was the 39-year-old cruised to a first-place time of 2:52:02, 13 seconds ahead of runner-up Gabriel Finn of Anamosa, Iowa. In all, 126 runners completed the full marathon.



A week earlier, Langdon placed sixth at Omaha under much better conditions than those for Heartland, which was delayed by lightning for about 20 minutes. He said he hoped there would not be a repeat of last year when the race

Tim Langdon breezes past the finish line as winner of the 2020 Heartland Marathon. (Photo by Justin Barnes.)

started, then was canceled.

Said Langdon: “I was thinking, ‘I don’t care what’s going on, I’m getting a marathon in today.’”

His winning time was 32 minutes slower than his personal best set two years ago at the Lincoln Marathon (where he finished eighth). He isn’t sure how many full marathons he’s run, but he admits to completing more 50K races than marathons.

There’s a standard belief that it takes at least two to three weeks of recovery from a marathon, so you’d think a runner would be sore a week later. Not so for the champion.

“I felt much better (after finishing Omaha) than I expected,” he said. “I was able to take it easy on Monday and Tuesday, do some walking and do some light run-

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Marathon: Reconstruction near the river alters start/finish

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was definitely a logistical challenge up front.”

As if there weren’t enough headaches for the race staff, the start/finish line had to move from the Lewis & Clark Landing due to the massive refurbishing of that area. The staging area was moved north of the Gallup riverfront campus, and the race took place mostly on the trail system on both sides of the Missouri River.

Konda said the race committee had plenty of time to make yet another finish-line adjustment, along with another alteration of the course.

“We knew two years in advance that we wouldn’t be able to be (at the landing), no matter what this year, so we were looking at alternate locations,” he said. “Then with

COVID-19 in place, the other routes just weren’t an option with the city. City officials wouldn’t even consider those if it took an excessive amount of police coverage.”

The end result that Sunday morning: 126 finishers in the full marathon, 150 in the half and 59 for the 10K. Seven relay teams completed the 26.2 miles.

Tim Langdon of Bennington was the marathon winner in 2:52:02. Krista Lewis of Oswego, Ill., was first among females (fourth overall) in 3:10:17.

Benjamin Gabrek of Chicago won the half in 1:20:15, and his wife, Margaret, was the women’s medalist in 1:40:36. The 10K champion was Craig Halverson of Omaha in 36:59, and Hannah Hornsby of Omaha captured the women’s title in 44:30. The relay team of OPE was clocked fastest in 3:20:30.

As with any race, a strong volunteer presence is vital if it’s to be a success. And that certainly appeared to be the case for the Heartland. Whitaker expressed his admiration and gratefulness while applauding runners at the finish line.

“The Omaha Running Club board and the volunteers who sign up constantly to help out make these races go and make them the great events that they are,” he said. “There are two other marathons in Omaha, but I think ours is head and shoulders above others.”

He continued: “I’ve had several compliments already today on the volunteers and the setup and the things we’ve done for the runners. I think our crew does a fabulous job, and I’m just very, very proud of everybody and all the hard work they put in.”

'Minimum Age 70' relay team adds new face

"Once more, we had an unbeatable team (for our age group)."

That was the assessment from Mariana Phipps, a member of the Minimum Age 70 relay team competing at the Heartland Marathon. The five members were the "most experienced" (to be polite) of the seven relay teams entered.

Joining Mariana were Jose Badillo (81), Anne Medeiros (77), Lorraine Whitaker (77) and newcomer Grant Story ("just" 73).

"Grant had to put up with all the matrons of the group," Mariana said, "while Jose is always the first runner on the relay. After he finishes, he returns to the finish/start line to volunteer. Hopefully, Grant will return next year — perhaps with a good book to read."

"Seriously, we had fun and cheered all the runners on throughout the race."

The team finished the 26.2 miles of handoffs in 5:27:09. The much-younger group called OPE won in 3:20:30.



The 2020 Minimum Age 70 relay team, from left, are Anne Medeiros, Mariana Phipps, Lorraine Whitaker, Jose Badillo and Grant Story.

25 states are represented

A glance at the final results of the Heartland Marathon shows runners from 25 states crossed the finish line. They came from as far as California, Washington, New York and Florida.

That was pleasing news to Tom Whitaker, ORC president and race director.

"I'm really, really happy with that," he said, "to see how many people who have turned out to join us for this."

COVID-19 to continue?

COVID-19 has disrupted lives in more ways than one. It affected so many activities, including the Heartland Marathon. Whitaker noted that the virus already has claimed California's Big Sur Marathon scheduled for April 2021.

"I think this is going to go on for goodness knows how long," he said. "I don't think we've come anywhere near the end of it."

Langdon: 2020 Heartland winner enjoys his daily outings

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ning and jogging. I could feel it the first two miles today in my legs, but it was nice to keep a pretty steady pace.

"There wasn't anything to prove really, just go out and have some fun."

If the name Langdon sounds familiar, it should — at least to Heartland organizers. He won the inaugural marathon in 2015, which took place under unseasonably hot and windy conditions.

"I remember it was in the 90s with steady winds of 20 to 30 mph," he said. "I just couldn't believe that."

Heat wasn't the issue this year as temperatures were ideal for the runners — once the threat of lightning abated. Langdon liked that — and the new course adjustments.

Heartland by the Numbers:

126 Runners completing the full

150 Runners completing the half

59 Runners completing the 10K

7 Relay teams reaching the finish

25 States represented

"I like this course, being back and forth," he said. "There was lots of encouragement. It was well-marked. It's nice to have a course where it's actually the length it's supposed to be."

The week before, the Omaha Marathon was operated, again, by an outside entity as opposed to the Heartland, which is controlled 100 percent by the ORC. That wasn't lost by the marathon champion.

"I like the local support," Langdon said. "There are just good people running it."

Langdon, a lawyer, has been coping with the COVID-19 world we live in like everyone else. But, as is the case with all runners, it fails to curtail his daily routine.

"I'm just grateful that I can get out the door early every morning," he said. "There's never anybody around. That's my time in the morning where there's no music, no anything. It's just a quiet time to relax and get ready for the day."

"I make it a point to never read the news or do anything before I go out to run, so I'm not thinking about that while I'm running. I stay away from work email before I go run in the morning. It's nice and peaceful."

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For more about the ORC, go to:
omaharun.org

Follow the Club on Facebook, Twitter
& Instagram!

President's Message

It is just a couple days since the conclusion of the Omaha Running Club's Heartland Marathon for 2020, and I hardly know where to start to comment on the success of this year's event. My first thought is I am totally surprised and happy that we were able to put on a race at all in the face of COVID-19.

But runners seem eager to return to a sense of normalcy, even if normalcy seems a long way off, and are grateful to do something we all love — run a race! Secondly, I will continue with what I consider the most important factor and express deep appreciation and gratitude for our tremendous volunteers that I believe everyone will agree are the single-most important contributors to the success we experienced. We received many compliments from our participants on the enthusiasm and support everyone provided. 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 provided continuing elevation of 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 and Board for the leadership and just plain hard work that went into presenting our event. We are convinced that we did a good job, but the real proof of how we did is in the feedback from our participants. We received many compliments on all phases of the event and I would like to take the liberty of presenting below a couple quotes we received:



Tom Whitaker

From Denver:

"Thank you so much for putting on such a great race. I really enjoyed the course and the people!"

From Chicago:

"Thanks for a great race on Sunday. My husband and I came in from Chicago to visit family and had a great time doing the half!"

From Miami:

"What a great race! I won an award, overall masters female. I am heading back to Miami which is home. Can the award be mailed?" (Yes, all out-of-town awards were mailed.)

From Illinois:

"Thanks for putting on a great race during these difficult times."

From Michigan:

"Very well organized! So happy it was able to happen after driving 12 hours! Volunteers were awesome! The masks were clever and I'll use often! The nutrition at the end and bottled drinks on the course was also VERY nice."

From Nebraska:

"Thank you for a great race. Last year was incredibly disappointing and this year was so fun."

From Omaha:

"Outstanding job to you and your team for putting on the 2020 Heartland Marathon. I appreciate all the work that was done to put on this event, especially with the added challenges this year. Although I wasn't sure if I would like the 2-loop marathon course, to me it really helped running the marathon seem a little easier."

Another from Omaha:

"Thank you ORC and volunteers for making

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

Hearty Heartland effort deserves salute

By John Fey

With each passing year — since the inaugural event that was staged in 2015 — I continue to be amazed at the months of planning and hard work on race day that helps make the Omaha Running Club's Heartland Marathon such a fantastic experience for the hundreds of participants. This year certainly was no exception.



As you've read in this issue, there were serious concerns that Heartland would fall victim to COVID-19 — just as was the case with such big-time marathons like Boston. Just look at the various local races that were canceled or postponed due to the pandemic.

You hate to say that the Club's signature event is jinxed, but the Heartland Marathon has faced obstacles pretty much in each of its first six years. Start with 2015, when race organizers were told by the city — at virtually the last minute — the original course was a no-go. That meant coming up with a new staging area and sending all runners onto the Keystone Trail.

As if that wasn't a big-enough headache,

the race-day weather was scorching hot for the first week of September (or even July, for that matter).

Another challenge for the race committee came with the Missouri River flooding — more than once. That caused some late course corrections.

But with all those monkey wrenches thrown at race organizers, nothing compares with 2019's weather woes. The races went off under threatening skies, but Mother Nature blasted downtown with an explosive wind gust and heavy rain that forced officials to cancel the race out of an abundance of trying to keep those on the course out of more danger.

I wasn't aware the race was stopped upon arriving at the staging area at Lewis & Clark Landing. Volunteers were packing up by then, and most runners had left for home.

Surely, I thought, this year would be better. How could things possibly get any worse? Well, we found out with the addition to our vocabulary one word: coronavirus.

While wrestling with that, the city closed the area where the start/finish line had been the past few years due to the reconstruction of the Leahy Mall and L&C Landing. But at least with that advance knowledge, organizers were able to come

up with an alternative staging area just north of the Gallup headquarters, where ample parking was available.

So with COVID-19 concerns eased to the point where health officials gave the event the OK, all that was left to fret over was, of course, the weather. And, sure enough, thunder and lightning caused a delay of about 20 minutes. Unlike a year ago, conditions improved quickly, and runners actually enjoyed a fairly ideal temperature near 60.

Yes, overall numbers were down for this year's Heartland compared to past events, but that's understandable when you take into account COVID-19 concerns for some participants and the threatening weather that Sunday morning. That didn't diminish the enthusiasm from the runners and the volunteers scattered throughout the course.

Another gratifying aspect I've gleaned over the past six years of this marathon is the turnout by our great volunteers. They continue to support the event, regardless of weather conditions. Here's a tip of my cap to John Hall, volunteer coordinator, and all who helped turn this marathon into such a success.

Here's hoping that the 2021 Heartland will be spared from further woes, be it weather or COVID-19.

Message: Club's top priority is putting on a good event

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it a special day for us! This one really meant a lot, and everything was fabulous! THANK YOU!"

Another from Omaha:

"I had a wonderful time completing my first official half marathon on Sunday! Thanks to you all and all the volunteers for putting on a safe, fun event."

We believe we are indeed successful because we are an event put on by runners,

for runners. Our local presence year-round provides familiarity with the local running community. Our top priority is putting on a good event to support our local and out-of-town running guests, and we believe comments such as those above support our position.

We are already at work planning next year's races with a tentative date of Sept. 26, 2021.

Stay tuned for further details.

In the meantime, registration is open for

our Halloween-themed Bones Run at Standing Bear Lake on Oct. 30 at 7 p.m. This is always a fun event! Costumes are encouraged. Sign up today!

Calling all volunteers!

Your Omaha Running Club is always looking for volunteers to assist with many races. For complete information, go to omaharun.org and click on the volunteer tab at the top.

ORC member dedicates runs to cancer

One would think that the Omaha Running Club members are from, well, the Omaha area. And for the most part you'd be right. But there is at least one exception.

Rik Zortman joined the Club when he lived in western Iowa. Today he lives in Coralville, Iowa, more than 240 miles east of Omaha. But for those who monitor the ORC Facebook page, you might think he lives close by with his occasional posts about a unique style of running he's developed.



Rik Zortman

While living in Avoca — west of Council Bluffs — he often drove to Omaha for races like the Omaha Half Marathon and Market to Market Relay. Along the way, he made friends from the Omaha area.

Zortman didn't turn serious about running until tragedy struck his family in 2009. His 3-year-old son, Armstrong, died of cancer, and that's when he decided to turn running into a means of helping give comfort to others going through that same pain.

"He was the youngest of five, and he loved to run," he said. "So I picked up running to try to keep his memory alive. I basically haven't stopped since."

Starting his crusade wasn't easy as his emotions continued to boil.

"It was tough," he said. "It's still tough to this day. Back then when we were going through it, we followed a few kids who had it, and a couple of them passed away."

The Zortmans were given the grim prognosis in December 2008. They were told Armstrong had three to six months to live.

"You just know that the end was near, and that sucks," he said. "It was tough to see."

After the loss of his son, Zortman came up with the idea of dedicating various



Volunteers recognized at Heartland

Another casualty of COVID-19 was the Omaha Running Club's Volunteer Dinner, which serves as the annual thank-you event for those who freely give up their time to help with Club events. That didn't mean there wouldn't be a recognition ceremony.

As part of this year's Heartland Marathon weekend, the Club's top three volunteers were awarded plaques. If the faces in the photograph at right look familiar, they should. Tom Stagon, Bob Bogar and Jose Badillo are mainstays at various ORC-managed races.

"They really helped us out," said John Hall, the Club's volunteer coordinator. "Tom had 15 volunteer days, and Jose and Bob each had 14 volunteer days. They did really well."

Smaller races don't need that much volunteer support. The Heartland Marathon, on the other hand, is a massive undertaking — from the staging area (start/finish line) to water stations and medical support on the course.

This year's course was somewhat easier to manage since it was run in loop fashion rather than out and back. The coronavirus added to Hall's task of securing help.

"Although we don't need nearly as many volunteers, it's still difficult to get volun-



John Hall, volunteer coordinator, (at left) handed out the plaques to the Club's top volunteers for 2020. To John's left are Tom Stagon, Bob Bogar and Jose Badillo. (Photo by Tom Whitaker.)

teers out here because of COVID-19," he said that Sunday morning as the Heartland was winding down. "But everybody came through, and they're doing a wonderful job today."

Once again, rain and lightning threw an-

other curveball into the event. But that didn't stop Hall's volunteers.

"The Omaha running community is doing a lot for the city and the runners and the community as a whole," he said. "It's a good, healthy event."

23rd Go Girl Run draws an enthusiastic turnout

Despite COVID-19 concerns, the 2020 Go Girl Run was able to be staged Sept. 7 on the Keystone Trail. On an ideal morning for a race, 65 females finished the 5K.

Angee Henry Nott of Elkhorn was overall winner in 23:23, just nipping runner-up Natalie Mancuso of Omaha at the finish. Natalie and sister Katie won the sister team title in a combined 57:44, and first in the mother-daughter team competition was the Mind Over Miles twosome of Brooklyn (9) and Jenny (36) Fitch.

The race wrapped up another year of the Step Into Running program.



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