



OMAHA RUNNING CLUB NEWSLETTER

For the members of the Omaha Running Club * Vol. 50* Summer 2021

ORC marathon marching onward

Will this be the year when everything falls perfectly into place for the Heartland Marathon? That's no doubt the hope of organizers after battling so much adversity in the past.

Between weather issues and last year's COVID-19 concerns, the Omaha Running Club's signature event is due for a break. At least that's what Club president Tom Whitaker believes. He's upbeat about increasing entries for the Sept. 26 race.

"Planning is going well," Whitaker said "We are getting pretty good response so far with participation way ahead of last year, of course, and about even with two years ago. We have tried to promote better this year and believe we are seeing positive results from that."

The start/finish line for the marathon, half marathon and 10K will be located just north of the Bob Kerrey Pedestrian Bridge. The gun goes off at 7 a.m. for the full marathon.

The 2021 marathon course is planned to remain the same as last year's "subject to change with continually threatened construction over in Iowa," Whitaker said. "But nothing at this point suggests any changes."

The Heartland Marathon is locally-owned and managed by the ORC. The race proceeds go right back to supporting the Omaha running community and to services which also support the running community.



Runners take off in one of the many waves used for the 2020 Heartland. Hopefully, masks won't be required this year. (Photo by Justin Barnes.)

Heartland Marathon

When: Sept. 26

Where: 151 Freedom Park Rd.

Time: 7 a.m. (marathon start)

Register: heartlandmarathon.org

A strong volunteer effort is essential for any running event, but it's especially true for the marathon.

"We have had amazing support in the past," Whitaker said, "and John Hall

reports great progress in filling spots this year. We could not hold the event without the dedication of everyone who turns out to provide such excellent support for our participants.

"We know this is true from the many comments praising our volunteers that we have noted on social media in the past. John Hall, of course, does a remarkable job getting what we need and getting everyone where they belong at race time."

To register, go to heartlandmarathon.org.

McMahon meet a hit

The Jim McMahon Open Track Meet draws young and old athletes to Omaha Westside High. **Page 2.**

Go Girl Run preparation

The Step Into Running program took off last month with the goal of preparing for the Go Girl Run. **Page 2.**

Soukup enjoys Villages

Lou Soukup packed up his running shoes 10 years ago and found new competition at the Villages in Florida. **Page 3.**

McMahon meet draws younger crowd

The fourth annual ORC Jim McMahon Open Track Meet took place June 13 at Westside High School. The event honors Jim McMahon, former longtime Midland University cross country and track coach. McMahon was one of the founding members of the Omaha Running Club in the 1970s.

“The meet is pretty low-key, which is how coach McMahon would have wanted it,” meet director Derek Fey said. “But it continues to grow each year, and that is exciting.”

For this year’s edition, local youth athletes from various club track and field teams participated for the first time.

This led to the highest participation in the event in its four years.

Events on the track ranged from 100 meters to 5,000 meters. Participants also competed in the long jump, high jump, discus, shot put and javelin.

Automatic timing has been used at the meet since its inception, but this year saw the addition of live results. Athletes and family members could access results at the conclusion of each event.

“Opening the meet up to youth athletes will only continue to help this event grow,” Fey said. “And live results makes everything run smoother from awards to resolving issues with results.”

“We’ll definitely use live results each year.”

This year did pose a unique situation from the competitive angle. The day of the meet was the last chance for elite track and field athletes across the United States to qualify for the U.S. Olympic Trials. With only a handful of meets across the country scheduled for June 13, Fey was contacted by several athletes hoping to get in the meet.

“I had athletes from out of state contacting me the week of the meet,” Fey said. “Unfortunately, for various reasons, their schedules didn’t line up, but it was pretty exciting and nerve-wracking for a few days there.”



The 2021 Step into Running (SIR) training kicked off June 8 with a group of 25 women, making this one of the largest groups ever. The program provides couch to 5K style training to those interested in running a 5K, specifically the Go Girl Run, held on Labor Day. This year we are excited to be able to hold the training 100% in person again and are even more excited to be a part of each of these ladies’ running journeys.

— Jeremy Kaliff

Soukup loving life in the Villages

When he lived in the Omaha area, Lou Soukup was frequently found among the top finishers in nearly every race he entered. For the past 10 years, he's doing the same thing in Florida, specifically, the Villages.

He and wife Connie might be retired, but they live anything but a recluse lifestyle in the popular community northeast of Orlando that just keeps growing. Both are extremely active.

The biggest change since moving south: Florida's weather, of course.

"I never have to wear sweatpants in a race," he said last March. "In Omaha when we had those winter races, it was colder than hell."

Soukup's story is similar to many who joined the Omaha Running Club so many decades ago. A wrestler at Bellevue High School, he got his first taste of competitive road racing in 1983.

"I started running when I was going to quit smoking," he said. A friend said, 'You know, running is the best way to quit smoking.' So I started jogging at the YMCA after work on a little indoor track.

"And then I saw a flyer for the Creighton 6-mile run. It was coming up in late March, so I decided I was going to enter that and see what happens. I ran the race and enjoyed the competitive nature of that race. Then I decided I was going to do that again."

Long before the birth of the Internet, Lou began looking for information on other races. Back then, the World-Herald was his primary source.

"Toward the end of that year, I joined the Omaha Running Club," he said. "They held their annual meeting at a Godfather's Pizza. I went there, and there were eight or 10 people there. They said they were going to hold elections for officers.

"I decided to write myself in. They were going to elect six people, and there were about seven of us there. They took all of



Lou Soukup has racked up plenty of hardware from his long running career, which he continues while living in Florida.

us. I was doing it because I thought that I would be giving advice. Then I found out it was a working board. Everybody on the board did some work."

That's not quite what Soukup had in mind.

"I wanted to run races, not work the finish line," he said. "So I volunteered to help with course measurement."

He was introduced to a member of the Army Corps of Engineers who was doing course measurement. Lou quickly found out the guy was burned out, and he needed some help.

Recalled Soukup: "I called him, and he said, 'Boy, am I glad you're taking this on. I'm just really tired of it.'"

He told Soukup he began charging \$100 for course-measurement services, but that didn't slow the demand. Lou eventually took over and served in that capacity for the next few years. Those were

the early years of the Plains Track Club, as it was known. In the late 1980s, the PTC became the Omaha Running Club.

"They had a guy who came up with the new logo (a cheetah) and came up with new shirts," Soukup said. "The Club became divided at that point. The competitive guys kind of took the reins (of the Club) for a while."

Meanwhile, Soukup was fully engaged in running. In 2006, he noted in the March/April ORC newsletter that he had completed nearly 2,000 road races. He became the Club's self-appointed historian and chronicled Omaha's running that year.

In 2004, the Club started inducting runners into a newly formed Hall of Fame. Soon Soukup took the lead on the nomination process and eventual voting on HOF candidates.

See Soukup, Page 4

Soukup: First Hall of Fame ceremony recalled as being emotional

Continued from Page 3

"I was doing the history of running and calling people up and interviewing them for the articles," he said. "I thought some people did some really neat stuff here to get this Club going. I felt we ought to honor them."

Lou then pitched the idea to Club president Tom Whitaker, and he agreed. The first year produced about 20 nominations, and seven were elected.

"They were all super contributors," Soukup said, "and that's how it got going."

The inaugural HOF class was introduced at the ORC's annual meeting. That first class consisted of Frank Perrone, Jill Garlock (posthumously), John Petersen, John Thomas, Karlene (Erickson) Herrell, Mick Freeman and Nancy McCormick.

Soukup recalls that initial HOF ceremony as being "very emotional. Some of the guys were holding back tears talking about their early running days and what an honor it was to be picked."

From that successful beginning, the HOF continued to grow.

Even though he moved to Florida, Soukup continued to coordinate the Club's Hall of Fame for the next five or six years. He realized the task would better be served by someone living in Omaha. He had a discussion with Alan Higley.

"I told him, 'This might be a good job for you.' Of course, he took it," Soukup said. "He takes it seriously."

Soukup still takes races seriously in his relatively new environment. Other than the climate change, he said races are no different than when he ran in the Midwest.

"I go to little towns, and it's still the same for me," he said. "I hunt out races where I can score and avoid races where there are big numbers. Sometimes I have to go run the big races and compete."

He added: "Everybody worries about



Lou Soukup won more than his fair share of plaques from the Richfield Run. Now he's beating the competition in Florida. "This place ruins your whole perspective about vacations," he said.

their age group just like they did back in Omaha. You get people to show up down here when they're on vacation, and they blow up the age group – a lot of the similar stuff."

As much as Lou and Connie enjoy Florida, don't be misled. He misses the many friends he made through Omaha's Club.

"The problem in the last four or five years I was there, I'd go to a race, and the only people I knew would be the finish-line crew," he said. "There were hardly any runners I knew."

He continued: "I ran a race out at Skutt High, and they had 300 people there. The only people I knew were Gary Julin working the finish line and Tom Whitaker."

A couple years ago, he did run into familiar folks at the Thanksgiving Run at the Nebraska Furniture Mart.

He misses what he called "characters" from years past.

"They were fun, and they hung around," he said. "Now you go to the races and it's just different."

Lou recalls when running started declining in the early 1990s. He credits the opening of Peak Performance for changing that.

As much as he misses Omaha, Soukup has found a new home in Florida.

"I wouldn't live anywhere else," he said. "We've been to 62 countries, and there are some places we've been that are really, really neat, but I wouldn't want to live there. This place ruins your whole perspective about vacations."

When he's put away his golf clubs for the day, he and Connie find many other activities.

"I get up every day, and I'm excited, because I'm going to do stuff I like to do," he said. "I might go for a run, I might ride my bicycle, I might do a line-dance class. I might to go to a dance. That's where I want to spend my time."

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For more on the ORC, go to:
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President's Message

The light we have seen in the distance, are we really at the end of the COVID-19 tunnel? Although even the experts seem to think that may be the case, the new Delta variant raises fears that we may backslide into another epidemic situation. It can only be hoped that vaccine holdouts will see the light and get their shots so that COVID-19 will, indeed, soon be behind us.

I have noted an increase in activity at Lake Zorinsky. 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 has had 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 the pandemic finally progresses. At this writing we will hold Lake Wehrspann Aug. 1 as planned as well as Peak to Peak on Sept. 4 and Go Girl Run Sept. 6.

Our premier event, Omaha's Heartland Marathon, along with the Marathon Relay, Half Marathon and 10K will be held Sept. 26. The events may be a little different from the past as we may still have to create wave starts to observe 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 insure everyone's safety. But we are planning on holding the best event in Omaha, and we look forward to welcoming as many of you as possible to participate and support your Club.



Tom Whitaker

As you know, the Omaha Running Club is a volunteer organization with a mission to support the Omaha running and walking community. We do our best to support that mission to the extent that everyone's available personal resources permit. There are a number of national events these days that

serve a purpose by putting on challenging and unique events, but they are not owned locally. I would urge everyone to keep in mind that although these may be worthy events, they come to town, utilize local resources and leave town with the proceeds.

Other than providing an event in which to participate, they do little to support our local community. Please keep our local events in mind as you plan your fall racing season.

We especially hope you will go to heartlandmarathon.org as soon as you can after you read this message and sign up for one of Omaha's Heartland Marathon events.

Not ready for a marathon or the half? Then get a team together and do the relay or sign up for the 10K. Not ready to run at all? You can still be a valuable part of this event by volunteering. We always need A LOT of volunteers to make this a success. We will have volunteer opportunities listed soon, so check out omaharun.org/volunteering and sign up. You will be providing a very important service to our local running community.

My point with the foregoing is to emphasize that your support for your Club by running or volunteering for local events is important. Remember, money raised stays here in Omaha to support you, the local runner, the very reason for our existence. Hope to see you at the Heartland!

**Mark your calendar: Heartland Marathon
Sept. 26. Go to heartlandmarathon.org**

Are we back to normal? Time will tell

By John Fey

Since taking over this newsletter some 13 years ago, I've tried to stay away from politics or writing columns that are heavy in opinion. But after witnessing what happened at this year's College World Series, I was left wondering:

What were the players, head coach and athletic administrators at North Carolina State thinking?

For those of you who didn't follow the CWS, a brief recap is in order.

The Wolfpack came to Omaha as a heavy underdog but won their first two games. Now in the catbird seat, the team was informed shortly before their Friday game against Vanderbilt that 14 players were tested positive for COVID-19 and thus ineligible to suit up. With just 13 players available, NCSU lost 3-1.

Then came the devastating NCAA ruling that the Wolfpack's rematch with Vanderbilt was declared "no contest," meaning their season was over and the Commodores would advance to the best-of-3 championship series. The NCAA apparently deemed that NC State wouldn't have enough healthy players to compete for that finals berth.

Upon hearing that, my first reaction was, "Why the hell didn't each player on every team get vaccinated ahead of the tournament?"

The answer came in the July 26 World-Herald story. The school's athletic director said some players wanted to wait to get vaccinated until the CWS was over. Their reason? They were worried about possible side effects from the shot. The head of athletics also said the university couldn't require players to get vaccinated.

That just left me shaking my head. Why would the players risk something like



this happening? Yes, I understand that younger folks were reporting issues with the vaccine. Still, I'll bet in 10 or 20 years the NC State players will look back and wish they would have taken the shot — damn any side effects.

My wife and I received our two shots in March, and, yes, we had minor side effects with the second one. But I remember as an athlete playing with flu-like symptoms, and it appears that's fairly close to what some of the affected players were facing.

But, as we learned months ago, COVID-19 is treated so much differently than the flu. Test positive, and you're sitting out as an athlete — even if you're asymptomatic.

So what does that have to do with running? Quite a bit, actually. I'm thinking specifically about the Sept. 26 Heartland Marathon. A year ago, the marathon was allowed to be conducted — under specific guidelines from health officials. The runners went off in waves, and all were required to wear masks at the start.

A year later, about 50 percent of all Nebraskans were vaccinated. But what about that remaining 50 percent? Will some of those be lined up for the Heartland's start?

From here it seems like a selfish act to not get vaccinated — especially with the new strain that arrived in Nebraska just a few weeks ago. The mind-boggling thing is how easy it is now to get your shots. There's no appointment needed pretty much anywhere you go.

I'll admit at the very beginning, I wasn't totally convinced that the pandemic was as serious as first predicted. But after losing two friends to COVID-19, I wanted to get vaccinated as soon as the opportunity arose. We're both glad we did.

I felt good to enter our local Hy-Vee store without a mask requirement. To me, it was a big step to getting closer to normal. That also applied to lifting the mask requirement for restaurants.

I'd like to think that 100 percent of those entering the Heartland Marathon will be fully vaccinated, but I suspect that may not be the case. I'm sure I can speak for the hard-working race organizers by saying please, please get your vaccination.

Like the commercials we've seen urge: Finish strong, Nebraska.

* * * *

Speaking of the Heartland Marathon, here's hoping for smooth sailing for the runners and the race committee. They've had to deal with Mother Nature's fury (extreme heat and floods) and construction that caused course adjustments just about every year.

Then, of course, came COVID-19 a year ago that threatened to cancel the event. The forces of nature can't be controlled, but the event is due for a break. Here's hoping this is the year.

As addressed by our Club president, a strong volunteer presence is key to making a marathon successful. We've been blessed with outstanding helpers. I'll also second Tom Whitaker's praise for volunteer coordinator John Hall. He's the best when it comes to rounding up these key people.

Even if you can't volunteer, you're more than welcome to cheer the runners on the course or at the finish line. As a four-time marathoner, there's nothing more uplifting than hearing cheers as you run by crowds and, especially, at the finish.

I think back, especially, to the 2002 Baltimore Marathon. The support from volunteers and spectators was amazing. It took my mind off (temporarily, at least) the discomfort running up and down my body.

What a contrast that was compared to my two Lincoln Marathons (1983-84) and the 1984 Omaha Marathon where there was very little fan support on the course.

Any runner will tell you a show of support makes any race more enjoyable.



ORC donates back to Omaha

As part of the Omaha Running Club's mission to support local groups, proceeds from last year's Heartland Marathon went to the Omaha Police Foundation. A couple of months after the event, the Club was glad to present a check for \$500. Club president Tom Whitaker, left, and fellow race director Daren Konda, far right, were there for the presentation. Accepting the check was Woody Bradford, president of the Omaha Police Foundation. Here's hoping that the next donation to a worthy cause exceeds the 2020 total. With your support, that could happen.

Omaha has deep history for marathons

Editor's note: Most of the following was written in 2004 and appeared in the ORC newsletter dated July/August. Thanks goes to Lou Soukup for researching that 17 years ago.

The first marathon in Omaha was held in 1974, and it was the brainchild of Herb Rhoades. A former star middle distance runner at Omaha University, Herb organized the first marathon as a project for the Omaha Jaycees. The marathon's original course started in downtown Omaha and made its way north — through the Ponca Hills area. Cliff Karthausner won the inaugural event in 2 hours, 31 minutes.

The name of the marathon would change over the years — typically when a new race director would take over. Originally dubbed the Omaha Jaycees Marathon, the name was shortened to the Omaha Marathon in 1975. Herb Rhoades remained the chairman, and the Jaycees were the chief sponsor as the event continued to grow in popularity.

The Plains Track Club became more involved in the marathon in 1978 — and by 1981, the Jaycees were pretty much out of the picture. That was the year Kathy Loper became the race director, and the race date was moved from September to November.

During the 1970s and '80s, the course evolved as well. In 1980, road construction caused the marathon to be moved to the Westroads — but other than that, downtown and the area north remained the heart of the course.

By 1985, the event enjoyed a record 826 finishers — and marathon participation was continuing to grow. In response to a drop in finishers to 427 the following year, a 10K was added in hopes of increasing numbers.

Gary Meyer took over as race director in 1991. During his tenure, he and the other organizers were forced to cut the marathon in half due to an unprecedented ice storm that struck in November 1997. The following year, the marathon was can-

celed due to a lack of sponsorship.

Thanks to Peak Performance stepping up as a major sponsor, the marathon returned in 1999 and was renamed the Arts on the Green Marathon. The course took on a major change, and the date was changed to August. That usually meant dealing with late-summer heat.

In 2013, the Omaha Marathon was purchased by a company out of New York called HITS Endurance. The history of an all-volunteer event in Omaha came to an end.

Seeking to return to those glory days, the Omaha Running Club established the Heartland Marathon in 2015. It was designed as a race "presented for runners by runners." It became an event locally-owned and managed. The race proceeds go right back to supporting the Omaha running community and to services which also support the running community.

ORC's marathon keeps on growing.

OMAHA RUNNING CLUB

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