



OMAHA RUNNING CLUB NEWSLETTER

*For the members of the Omaha Running Club * Vol. 51* Winter 2021-22*

Running community loses legend

Frank Perrone helped blaze the trail for the Omaha Running Club

When learning of the passing of Frank Perrone, ex-Omaha Running Club member Tim Glover immediately remembered the name and an early encounter with him.

"I bought my first pair of running shoes from Frank back in the 1970s," Glover recalled. "He was selling them out of his basement. They were New Balance 320's. I was thrilled to get them. He had a passion for running and inspired many new runners in Omaha."

That perfectly sums up what others said about Perrone, who died Nov. 30. He was 85.

In a World-Herald story that ran soon after his death, he was remembered by his daughter, Terri Connell, as "a proud man, and he'd want everyone to remember him as being an active guy. There was always some kind of sport he would be doing."

John Sullivan, who organized races decades ago, said Perrone always was generous with helping him out.

"As a volunteer, Frank Perrone was selfless," Sullivan wrote in a Public Pulse letter. "Year after year, he contributed merchandise, time and talent to assist children with muscular dystrophy. He was an individual who simply showed up every time and gave everything he had. I can hear Fr. Val Peter, who served as the



Frank Perrone was remembered by daughter Terri Connell as "a proud man, and he'd want everyone to remember him as being an active guy."

official starter at the Boys Town run, saying, 'Frank, you ran a good race!'"

Perrone put the "A" in active, long before he took up running and cycling. As a

freshman at Creighton University, he caught for Bob Gibson. He was the Omaha ping pong doubles champ in 1960.

See Perrone, Page 2

New ORC member eyes first road race

Plattsmouth resident Becky Wilfong hopes to ramp up her workouts in 2022, preferring to run outdoors. **Page 3.**

Urbach is a busy community volunteer

ORC advisor Vanessa Urbach of the Omaha Police Department finds time to help others. **Running Notes, Page 6.**

Perrone: Giving freely of time was one of many hallmarks



Frank Perrone's ORC hall of fame entry reads that he was one of the "pioneers of organized running" in Omaha. He also helped to organize the first all-female road race in the area. ORC president Tom Whitaker said, "He supported the club, and we certainly are going to miss him, that's for sure."

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He started running in the 1960s and ran 45 marathons over the years. He was a founding member of the Plains Track Club which later became the Omaha Running Club, where he is in the Hall of Fame.

He was also a long-time member of the Omaha Peddlers BC, as well as a past board member and committee chairman for BRAN. He rode his bicycle across Nebraska on the annual tour more than 30 times with his wife, Trudy. Perrone was known to take his bicycle on vacations, even once to Germany.

They recently celebrated their 64th anniversary together. Frank dearly loved his family, especially his five great granddaughters and three great grandsons.

"Family meant everything to him," Connell said.

Perrone had many passions and was always active in the community. He volunteered with the Douglas County Election Commission. In fact, he was inducted into the Nebraska Poll Worker Hall of Fame in 2010.

He also served as an official at the annual Nebraska State High School Track and Field Championship.

In that World-Herald tribute, Terri Connell recalled how busy the Perrone household was growing up. Terri and her three brothers all ran and participated in other sports. They shot hoops in the driveway, played tennis at the park and had ping pong matches in the basement. Of course, Frank had the upper hand as a champion in that sport.

"We were the kind of family that sat around and watched 'Wide World of Sports' on the weekend," Connell said. "We all were encouraged to be athletes because my dad led by example."

Perrone's Hall of Fame entry reads that he was one of the "pioneers of organized running" in Omaha. He also helped to organize the first all-female road race in the area.

While selling running shoes out of his house and car, he met many fellow runners, son Phil Perrone told the World-Herald.

"He had friends everywhere," said Phil, who often ran with his father. "It didn't

matter where dad was, he'd find friends. Mostly it was a social thing. He just loved running."

Among the many races Perrone organized was an annual New Year's Day run that started near his home. He eventually helped nonprofits organize running events as fundraisers.

Perrone worked out with several local cross country teams and often ran to and from work, including during a snowstorm, his daughter said.

"That was his source of entertainment," Connell said. "It was his identity."

Perrone stayed involved with the Club even after his running days were over. He and Trudy were members of the club's "Bean Team," which still provides food at running club events.

ORC president Tom Whitaker said Perrone's impact on Omaha won't be forgotten.

"He's certainly been helpful over the years," Whitaker told the paper. "He was around constantly, even after his organizing and running days were over. He supported the club, and we certainly are going to miss him, that's for sure."

Club newcomer eager for first race

Becky Wilfong is typical of many who make a vow to get active by walking or running, then fall out of the routine before realizing it's time to get back into it. She's taking a new look into the new year with hope of entering her first road race.

"I'm thinking about it now," Becky said. "I would love to do a race someday, hopefully this year. I did join some other fitness programs, but they're not working for me, either. I've just got to find the right niche."

When it came to sports, there was no niche to find while she attended Omaha South High School.

"Girls were taught to do shorthand, make coffee, and take dictation," she said. "They weren't taught that they could go to college. They weren't taught to join the military. They weren't taught anything like that at Omaha South."

Becky eventually earned an associate degree in education at Iowa Western. By then she and her husband, Dennis, were married and raising three sons.

Today, Becky and Dennis are busy as proprietors of Bellevue Printing in the city's Old Towne. They purchased the business on Franklin Street in 1997. At the start, she distributed flyers around her Bay Hills neighborhood in Plattsmouth, and business took off.

Choosing that business was easy, because Dennis worked for several years as a press operator. They took over printing duties for the ORC newsletter last year.

Becky got into the habit of walking long ago, starting at the Lied Activity Center in Bellevue.

"I walked there for nine years and lost 50 pounds doing that," she said. "The problem was, I got a job at the Lied, and I couldn't find time to do my walking anymore. It changed the whole dynamic of that."

Eventually, when more time became available, she picked up running. Fast-forward to the COVID-19 era, Becky choose to avoid crowds and opted to run



Becky and Dennis Wilfong have owned Bellevue Printing Company since 1997. Becky is getting more serious about running. "I would love to do a race someday, hopefully this year," she said. "I did join some other fitness programs, but they're not working for me, either. I've just got to find the right niche." She enjoys running and walking on the trail by Plattsmouth High School.

outside. She found a trail that surrounds Plattsmouth High School.

"I really like it, because it's almost like playing a video game," she said. "You go in front of the school, and then you go around the back side where there's a neighborhood. Then you go up the other side, where it's all wooded."

She continued: "When you go up the west side, you see the highway. It's not real boring. One time around is a mile. It has one big hill, but if you have it figured out right, you're running down the hill and not up the hill. It was a lot of fun. I'd go out early in the morning."

Becky said she's seen many others using the trail.

She built her endurance to where she could run four miles without stopping.

"I saw a YouTube video and found that you just run slower," she said. "I can walk about as fast as I run, but it didn't seem to bother my joints at all."

Becky finds that walking and running

can be beneficial in more than the obvious ways.

"I like the solidarity of being alone," she said. "It clears your head. I really like doing it very early in the morning, when I can watch the sun come up. Running sparks my imagination. It opens me up to find new places."

Becky, who joined the Omaha Running Club last year, initially set a goal of running her first half-marathon. She brought along Dennis, but she felt as she increased her distance she was keeping him there longer than he probably cared.

She's hoping to find another female who could give her the push she needs.

"I need a mentor of sorts," she said. "We all need mentors."

With the colder weather settled in, Becky prefers exercising at Bellevue's Lied Center, which she calls "a beautiful facility."

But, like all of us, she's waiting for warmer weather and the chance to return outdoors.

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Follow the Club on Facebook,
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President's Message

The Omaha running community lost one of its true pioneers with the passing of Frank Perrone back in November. Frank was one of the founding forces in the formation of the Plains Track Club that became the Omaha Running Club and set the stage for the outstanding organization we have today.

As you will note elsewhere in this issue, Frank was well known to one and all and is remembered by many of the old-timers and newcomers as well. The many events he ran and created such as the first women's races in Omaha are a testament to his importance.

Frank was no longer supremely active in running or event organization when I came on the scene 20-plus years ago but was still a strong supporter of running and the ORC through his participation as a member of the Bean Team providing food service and volunteer help for our events. I did not have the pleasure of knowing him from the old days but soon learned of his importance to the early days of our running community and his place in championing the sport of running in Omaha. Rest in peace, Frank, and be assured you will long be remembered and respected by runners in Omaha!

We have reached the end of another diffi-



Tom Whitaker

cult year for our organization. The Omaha Running Club puts on races, but we spent much of our time trying to analyze official COVID-19 restrictions, and deciding how to present events under those circumstances. Fortunately, we were able to hold our usual events while providing a safe environment

for runners and volunteers alike.

I am grateful for and extend a special THANK YOU to each and every member of the ORC Board and our great advisors for their time and hard work to help our Club fulfill its mission of supporting the Omaha running and walking community. But most of all, I am extremely grateful to all the volunteers who give their time and effort so freely all year as they are the ones who really keep us

going. We could not do anything without you.

This was particularly true with our Heartland Marathon this year as our volunteers stepped forward and met the challenge of taking outstanding care of participants. John Hall continues his superb record of managing our volunteer function. I am also pleased that we were able to hold the volunteer appreciation picnic last summer and look forward to being able to do so again this year.

See President, Page 5



Runners take off for the start of the 2021 Heartland Marathon. It's the signature event managed by the Omaha Running Club. Registration is open for the 2022 Heartland. (Justin Barnes Photography photo.)

Frank Perrone made his mark in town

By John Fey

Younger and new members of the Omaha Running Club likely don't recognize the name Frank Perrone. But the Club's "old-timers" certainly know how important he was to the running community.

As you'll note in this issue's top story, Perrone, 85, died Nov. 30. While I didn't know Frank very well, I did have a couple of chances to chat briefly with him. Once



I took over the controls as editor of this newsletter, I found out more how he helped form the Plains Track Club, which later morphed into the ORC.

Part of that knowledge came from Lou Soukup's Omaha running history lesson that was published in the Club newsletter more than 17 years ago.

Here's a snippet of what Lou wrote about the early days when a group of runners met at Elmwood Park for a jog or on the UNO track for speed workouts:

"In the late 60's, the group that met was comprised mostly of elite college and high-school athletes. The list included

many Big Eight and NAIA gold medal winners. Training runs were held daily – meets were once a week. Cross-country one week – track the next. There were also a few coaches who continued to run after graduation -- but it wasn't until the early 70's that "older" runners started to show up."

Lou added: "Frank Perrone, one of Omaha's road racing pioneers, said that initially only he and three other guys "over the age of 30" were involved. The young, fast runners didn't seem to mind – and they stayed around and called out times until all the old guys had finished."

Times certainly have changed since then. Our Club has grown and today is directed by an energetic Board that continues to seek ways to increase our membership. We should think fondly of "pioneers" like Frank Perrone.

* * *

We sure got spoiled by that December weather, huh? The day the "big wind" hit Dec. 15, I was playing 9 holes of golf. Three weeks later, the wind chill during my morning walk was minus-12.

If you ask any runner/walker, they'll tell you the temperature is one thing during the winter. The wind, on the other hand,

can be downright dangerous. Chicago might be called "the windy city," but Nebraska could claim to be "the windy state."

Since moving to Plattsmouth's Bay Hills subdivision more than four years ago, I seem to notice the wind more – probably because there aren't as many trees here to block the wind compared to when we lived north of the Crossroads.

Having the wind behind my back makes the cold temperatures tolerable. It's going into the wind that stings the face. Looking back on my log from a year ago, there was only one January day below 20 degrees, and none below zero. February, on the other hand, was brutal with 11 days under 20 (including three below-zero days) in the first 19 days.

What might this bone-chilling start mean for next month's Chiller Challenge?

Speaking of which, be sure to register for Chiller, which returns to Papillion Landing on Sunday, Feb. 6 (COVID-19 willing). This is a perfect venue, with a nice trail for those who want to run before the annual meeting. It's also the day the Club announces the new inductees into the ORC Hall of Fame. Hope to see you there!

President: Hope for 2022 includes return to 'normal' year

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I am grateful as well for all the runners who turned out to support our events and gave us their mark of approval by their participation.

My sincere best wishes to our members for a healthy and successful 2022. Thank you for supporting our Club. I look forward to seeing you at the Lake Manawa and LaPlatte winter series runs, and, hopefully, at the Chiller Challenge and annual meeting of members that, at press time, is scheduled for Feb. 6. We are working out the details for the event,

with final plans depending on the COVID situation over the coming weeks. Check the ORC website for updates.

We are busy planning our usual list of events for 2022 even though the coming year is still filled with uncertainty. The availability of two vaccines and a booster with the promise of several more to come give us hope that the world will continue to return to some semblance of normal.

Registration is open, and we are moving forward with plans to hold our premier event, Omaha's HEARTLAND MARATHON on Sept. 25. It is not too early to

begin planning your fall event. If you are interested in accurately measured and clearly marked courses, prompt and accurate results during the race, photo tagging and runner tracking, and race officials and volunteers who really care about your race experience, then we are the race for you. Check us out at heartlandmarathon.org. And the best part? The proceeds stay right here in Omaha to facilitate the ORC's year-round mission to support the local running community.

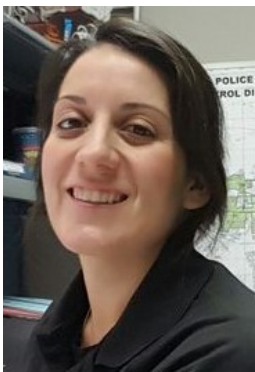
Run safely, and Happy New Year everyone!

Urbach finds time to help the ORC

Vanessa Urbach is more than busy as a member of the Omaha Police Department. But she makes time to serve as an advisor to the ORC Board as coordinator of the annual trail cleanup.

Her position with the OPD is Southwest Crime Prevention Specialist. The native Omahan, who graduated from Omaha South High, owns a bachelor's degree in Community Health from UNO.

In addition to her work with the ORC,



Urbach

Vanessa has gained experience working with the community as a volunteer race director for Feast and Feathers Trail Races which benefits Food Bank for the Heartland and as an MS Run the US relay runner (where

she raised more than \$10,000). She ran 190 miles to aid in funding research and promoting awareness for Multiple Sclerosis.

Vanessa is an active board member of Keep Kids Alive, Drive 25 and has served in previous positions with the National Safety Council, Nebraska, and Region 6 Behavioral Healthcare.

Vanessa's goal is to continue working together with the community to maintain and improve positive interaction and communications between law enforcement and civilians.

Ritland had active 2021

ORC member John Ritland didn't let knee-replacement surgery keep him from pounding the pavement in 2021. But he does admit his times aren't what they were in his "younger" days.

In a recent Facebook post, Ritland noted he had 365 active days, meaning he ran at least once every day. His mileage for the year was 1,876 running and another



John Ritland added the Berlin Marathon to his list last September. He also ran the Lincoln Marathon, Wabash Marathon and Boston Marathon.

68 cycling.

He ran four marathons — Lincoln, Wabash, Berlin and Boston.

"I'm getting slower if you haven't noticed," he wrote. "I expect that trend to continue in 2022!"

Group runs are a hoot

If you're looking for a group to run with, you don't have to look far — at least in the Aksarben Village area. There are at least two to choose from.

The FriYay group welcomes all runners each Friday, starting at 6 a.m. They meet at the Starbucks parking lot at 72nd and Poppleton. All paces are encouraged with distances ranging 4 miles, plus or minus, with an average of 3 to 5 miles.

On Tuesday nights, there's a group hooking up at Aksarben Village's Inner Rail at 6 o'clock. It's an out-and-back route on the Keystone Trail. Runners go at their own pace and their distance of choice.

2 winter series return

It's been a tradition for many years — the BTC/ORC Lake Manawa Winter Series and No Frills Racing Series. Lake Manawa's series began in December (the Jan. 1 race was canceled due to the cold), and the No Frills gathering started Jan. 8.

The two races go off on opposite weekends, so you can choose one or both.

The Lake Manawa runs are the first and third Saturdays of the month, starting at 10 a.m. Distances are 2 miles and 10K.

The No Frills Series (in its 29th year) takes place the second and fourth Saturdays of the month, at the LaPlatte Community Church. Start time is 10 a.m., and the distance is 5 miles.

For complete information, go to <https://omaharun.org/race-calendar>.

Blarney Stone date set

There are several area road races to choose from on and near St. Patrick's Day, but one of the more popular ones is offered by Peak Performance. The Blarney Stone 5K returns to the River City Star near the Missouri River Saturday, March 19. Start time is 9 a.m. The River City Star is located just north of the Gallup Campus on Riverfront Drive.

Race director Mike Ewoldt said both outside and inside gathering areas will be set up for social distancing before and after the run. Current race protocols, including a wave start and mask wearing unless running, eating or drinking, and other current race safety procedures will be followed.

The unique green paint award rocks return for finishing in the top three in their respective age groups. The entry fee starts at \$38 if paid by Feb. 13. To register, go to u2canrun.rocks.

Start February off with the Chiller

The Omaha Running Club's annual Chiller Challenge is scheduled to return to Papillion Landing, 1046 W. Lincoln St., on Sunday, Feb. 6, with one possible caveat — another resurgence of COVID-19. As of now, the event will take place with the current health precautions in place.

The morning kicks off with a 1K Kids' Run at 10:50, followed by a 2-mile Fun Run at 11 a.m. and the 8K Run at 11:05.

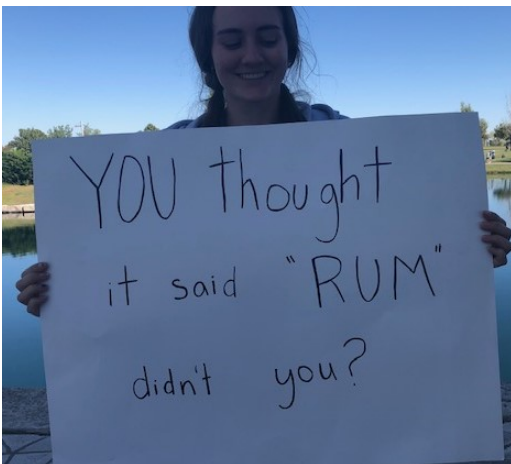
Lunch will be served before the annual meeting, which begins at 12:30. That's also when the newest inductees of the ORC Hall of Fame are introduced.

The event is free to all current club members if registered by Feb. 5. Race day entries are allowed at a cost of \$10.



Runners prepare to take off for the 8K run that started the 2020 Chiller Challenge. It was the first year for the event at Papillion Landing.

The year in pictures, 2021



OMAHA RUNNING CLUB

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